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Spinoza's *Ethics* | A GUIDE

MICHAEL LEBUFFE

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Preface: How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this Guide is to help readers to develop their own understandings of Spinoza's *Ethics*. The Guide includes chapters dedicated to each of the *Ethics*' five parts. In each chapter, I offer a summary of the whole part. Then, I consider about one fourth of Spinoza's argument in a given part at a time. I discuss that part of the argument and then raise research questions related to the material. Because this Guide aims primarily at first-time students of the *Ethics*, it includes only a few references to secondary scholarship. Readers who wish to pursue particular issues more deeply will find recommendations for further reading at the end of each chapter.

I suggest that first-time readers of the *Ethics* make use of this structure. For example, first, read *Ethics* 1 through quickly, in order to see the basic direction of Spinoza's argument. My summary of *Ethics* 1 at the beginning of [Chapter 1](#) can help to provide an overview. Next, read carefully through a small section of the text, the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 1, working to understand Spinoza more deeply. At §1.1, I offer a detailed account of that part of the text. Finally, the *Ethics* builds from its foundations, so it is useful, even if you do not endorse a particular response, to consider different views that one might take about pressing questions before moving on to the next small section of text. The research questions about the definitions and axioms following §1.1 can help you to recognize and consider several of these issues before you move on to Spinoza's opening propositions.

The *Ethics* is a work of philosophy that, by today's standards, is hugely ambitious. It includes complete, systematic accounts of God, nature, mind, body, knowledge, the human passions, and our power to mitigate them. Spinoza tells us in a brief preface to Part 2 that his principal aim in the work is to give an account of the human mind its highest blessedness. Such ambition may seem bound to lead to dense and difficult argumentation, and

it does. I hope that you find value in these challenges, as I always have. Spinoza's depth of inquiry and intellectual courage lead, even where readers disagree with him and even where he falls short, to profound insights about the questions that matter the most.

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I began this book during a visit to the Philosophy Department at UCLA, which was cut short by the pandemic. The lively company of John Carrier, Ed McCann, Calvin Normore, and the fantastic graduate students of UCLA and USC was nevertheless a great prompt to action. During the time when I was writing this book, brief, precious video-conference encounters with a few scholars—Aurelia Armstrong, Deborah Brown, Oliver Istvan-Toth, Ursula Renz, Michael Della Rocca, and Sarah Tropper—meant a great deal. During the final stages of composition, I was fortunate to be able to rely on the expertise of The History of Philosophy Roundtable at U.C.S.D. Thanks especially to Dafna Mark Ben Shabat, Leonardo Moauro, Jacob Zellmer, Clinton Tolley, Monte Johnson, Eric Watkins, and Sam Rickless, for their hospitality and their help with [Chapters 1 and 5](#).

Following OUP guidelines for this series, I have avoided footnotes and offered only limited suggestions for further secondary reading. I gratefully acknowledge the influence and instruction of many scholars who have contributed to the interpretative and historical points that appear here.

Thanks, with love, to Elisabeth Ellis, Susan LeBuffe, and Allison LeBuffe for continuing to tolerate my long discussions of demonstrations and invocations of rationalist principles.

Finally, in writing a guide for students, I have had occasion to appreciate again, and in a new way, the work of the great teachers who read the *Ethics*

with me. I dedicate this book, with gratitude, to Larry Morrisette, Stephen Menn, Margaret Wilson, Harry Frankfurt, Henry Allison, Paul Hoffman, Richard Arneson, David Brink, and Nick Jolley.

Abbreviations and Note on Translations

I use the following abbreviations for Spinoza's works:

TIE	<i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect</i>
KV	<i>Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well Being</i>
DPP	<i>Descartes's Principles of Philosophy</i>
TTP	<i>Theological Political Treatise</i>
TP	<i>Political Treatise</i>

I abbreviate passages in the *Ethics* by numerals referring to the parts of the *Ethics* in which they occur and one or more of the following letters:

d	definition
a	axiom
p	proposition
dem	demonstration
s	scholium
c	corollary
exp	explication
l	lemma
post	postulate
app	appendix
defaff	definitions of the affects

These letters will often be followed by a number referring to where they occur in the order of the part. For example, "2p40s2" will stand for *Ethics*, part 2, proposition 40, second scholium.

Where necessary, I refer to the critical edition of Spinoza's works: Spinoza. 1972. *Spinoza Opera*. Edited by Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter. Abbreviations of Gebhardt follow this format: G, volume number,

page number, and, where necessary, line number. For example, G3/91.6–15 stands for volume 3, page 91, lines 6 through 15 of the *Opera*.

I draw quotations of Spinoza, in some cases modifying them slightly, from the translations of Edwin Curley: 1985–2016. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. 2 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Gebhardt volume, page, and line numbers may be found in the margins of these translations.

For Descartes, where necessary, I refer to the critical edition: Descartes. 1964–1976. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. 11 vols. Paris: Librairie J. Vrin. Abbreviations of Adam and Tannery follow this format: AT, volume number, and page number.

Unless noted, I draw quotations of Descartes here from 1985–1991: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Donald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Adam and Tannery volume and page number may be found in the margins of these translations.

Introduction

This introduction includes suggestions about how to work with the *Ethics*' geometrical method; an account of Spinoza's life; and descriptions of some relevant positions in three predecessors, Aristotle, Maimonides, and Descartes. There is a great deal more to be said about each of these topics. The purpose of these discussions is to supply readers new to the *Ethics* with the background necessary to begin productive study.

I.1 Working with the Geometrical Method

The intricacy, ambition, and aspiration to systematicity of the *Ethics* are all evident in Spinoza's striking method. The method presents philosophy in a form that is more familiar in geometrical arguments, such as those of Euclid's *Elements*. It incorporates definitions, axioms, and postulates and proceeds to propositions, lemmata, and corollaries, for which Spinoza offers demonstrations that refer to earlier elements. Informal discussions frequently come in the form of prefaces and appendices to the *Ethics*' parts. There are also scholia, which interrupt the structured argument and which Spinoza typically uses to clarify particular formal elements or to mark significant points. Scholars refer to different passages in the *Ethics* by abbreviated reference to this apparatus. For example, I refer here to *Ethics*, Part 2, Proposition 21, Scholium as "2p21s." A table of these abbreviations may be found in the front matter here.

Readers have frequently complained that Spinoza falls short of the rigor, certainty, and clarity that he aspires to in the geometrical method. If the shortcomings are bad enough that the arguments cannot be taken as genuine attempts to establish Spinoza's propositions, that is some reason to discount Spinoza's demonstrations; to conclude that the geometrical method is an artifice and a distraction; and, as much as possible, to ignore it.

These complaints, in some cases, are justified. As one of Spinoza's first and best readers, Leibniz, complained in a letter of 1688, "Spinoza is full of twisted fantasies, and what he presents as demonstrations . . . do not so

much as resemble proofs” (Leibniz 1985, p. 98). Before we endorse Leibniz’s assessment, however, we should think about the standard for a good proof. Philosophers’ expectations today tend to be affected by their training in formal logic. We look for validity in arguments and emphasize syntax in doing so. By this standard, Spinoza’s arguments nearly always fail and can even seem uninteresting.

Here, for example, is the first proposition of the *Ethics* and its demonstration: “1p1: A substance is prior in nature to its affections. Dem.: This is evident from 1d3 and 1d5.” Schematically, including the language of the definitions that Spinoza cites in the demonstration, the argument proceeds:

Premise 1: By ‘substance’ I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed. (1d3)

Premise 2: By ‘mode’ I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived. (1d5)

Therefore, a substance is prior in nature to its affections. (1p1)

Key terms in the conclusion, such as “nature” and “prior,” do not appear in the premises. On the other hand, promising terms that do appear prominently in the premises, such as “in itself,” “through itself,” “in another,” and “through another,” disappoint. They are absent in the conclusion. Because the terminology is inconsistent, one might conclude that the demonstration does not even resemble a proof.

It may be inappropriate to demand this sort of rigor, however. After all, even the elegant proofs of Euclid are typically invalid. They require thought, interpretation, and, principally, the construction of figures. Spinoza’s proofs ought similarly to be given some kind of careful thought before they are dismissed. Moreover, if they are dismissed entirely, readers lose a precious resource for understanding Spinoza’s positions and why he held them.

A first step that one might take in order to understand and evaluate Spinoza’s demonstrations sympathetically is to think about the referents of Spinoza’s terms rather than the terms themselves. Here, the premises describe two sorts of entities, substances and modes. The demonstration to 1p1, in referring to these definitions, suggests that, if one carefully considers the referents as Spinoza defines them, one will come to see that

1p1 must be true. A mode is something that is conceived through a substance. Aside from his gloss relating conception to concepts at 1d3, Spinoza does not tell us what “conceived through” means, but perhaps it means something like “understood in terms of.” If that is right, then modes are understood in terms of substances by 1d5 and substances are understood in terms of themselves by 1d3. By the proposition, substances are “prior in nature” to their modes and the definitions show that this is so. Again, Spinoza does not tell us what “prior in nature” means. The definitions, so interpreted, offer a suggestion. One cannot understand a mode of a substance without understanding, at least to some degree, that substance, but one can understand a substance without understanding a given mode of that substance.

Treating the demonstrations seriously and critically is a difficult interpretative challenge, and the process of interpretation is ongoing: each new use of 1d3, 1d5, and 1p1 requires us to think again about what they might mean if Spinoza’s arguments are to be meaningful. Moreover, it by no means relieves Spinoza of the charge that his demonstrations are lacking. Frequently, even after this patient approach to the demonstrations, it remains difficult to see how, under any understanding of his premises, they could show the proposition in question to be true. This approach does, however, prevent quick, offhand dismissals of the demonstrations. Under it, the demonstrations remain valuable resources for understanding the *Ethics*.

I.2 Spinoza’s Life

Spinoza’s family were Sephardic Jews, who immigrated to the Netherlands, and eventually to Amsterdam, from Spain and Portugal in the early seventeenth century. Although imperfect and changeable, Amsterdam tolerated Jews. Notably, a restrictive permission was granted in 1619 to practice religion openly. Broader rights were granted to Jews much later, in 1657. In addition to toleration, Amsterdam offered economic opportunity. Spinoza’s family ran a moderately successful, small importing business. The family dealt in a varieties of goods, including sugar, candied ginger, wood, raisins, and almonds. Spinoza was born in Amsterdam in 1632. He was called “Baruch” or “Bento,” Hebrew and Portuguese names, respectively, meaning “blessed.” Later in life, he took up the Latin equivalent, “Benedictus.”

The family lived in the Vlooienburg Quarter and, by 1651 and perhaps much earlier, by the Houtgracht, a canal since filled to form the Waterlooplein. The family's first synagogue, Beth Jacob, and the community's Talmud Torah school, which Spinoza probably attended, were on the Houtgracht as well. It is likely, then, that Spinoza's early life revolved around a few closely situated buildings. The school's curriculum emphasized study of the Pentateuch, Hebrew grammar, arithmetic, and, for older students, the Talmud.

Spinoza probably left the school in 1649, after his older brother's death, in order to help with the family business, and his duties probably became more burdensome after his father's death in 1654. Although there is little solid evidence about Spinoza's life during this period, when he was around seventeen to twenty-three years old, it nevertheless seems to me to have been formative. Spinoza was young, relatively independent, and relatively free to use the cultural resources both of his community and of wider Amsterdam. His education was now more fully under his own control, and he had a variety of opportunities. He continued study within the Jewish community, in the academy of Saul Levi Mortera. Testimony from one of Spinoza's more hostile correspondents, Nicholas Steno, to the Inquisition suggests that Spinoza studied outside the community as well: he may have studied Latin—and read Descartes carefully for the first time—with the poet and playwright Franciscus van den Enden, who was known to have a wide variety of friends and interests.

In 1656 the governing board of the Talmud Torah congregation issued an unusually harsh writ of *cherem* against Spinoza. It begins:

The *Senhores* of the *ma'amad*, having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, have endeavored by various means and promises, to turn him from his evil ways. But, having failed to make him mend his wicked ways, and, on the contrary, daily receiving more and more serious information about the abominable heresies that he practiced and taught and about his monstrous deeds, and having for this numerous trustworthy witnesses who have deposed and borne witness to this effect in the presence of the said Espinoza, they became convinced of the truth of this matter. After all of this has been investigated in the presence of the honorable *chachamim*, they have decided, with their consent, that the said Espinoza should be excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel. (This translation is adapted from [Kasher and Biderman 1990](#).)

Cherem might in different circumstances be a blow from one's community that changes the course of one's life. In Spinoza's case, however, I guess that the severity of the language here betrays the governing board's concern

that their words and actions should matter to him: it is the written equivalent of screaming at someone who is no longer listening. Again, I guess—very little is known for certain about why the *ma'amad* issued the *cherem* or how it mattered to Spinoza—dramatic change to Spinoza's life had already come from his own decisions about what holds value.

Biographers hold different views about the cause of *cherem*. Steven Nadler argues that Spinoza's uncompromising public expression of his philosophical convictions best explains the unusual severity of the *ma'amad*'s language. Margaret Gullan-Whur suggests that a downturn in the family's business may also be relevant. In any case, *cherem*, however emphatic, seemed not to matter to him. Spinoza did move away from the Houtgracht, and he stopped working in the family business. However, he did not leave Amsterdam and did not otherwise show any kind of response. Although relevant correspondence may have been destroyed, no extant letters suggest that Spinoza dwelled on the event.

From the time of the *cherem* and perhaps a year or two before it until he left Amsterdam, roughly 1654 to 1661, Spinoza embraced a new community, which was based principally around philosophy (broadly construed to include what we would now call physical science) and especially Cartesian philosophy. In the late 1650s, he met frequently with friends from a variety of backgrounds, religions, and interests. Many of these—including probably Simon de Vries, Lodewijk Meyer, Pieter Balling, Johan Boumeester, Jarig Jelles, and Johannes Hudde—would become correspondents. Around 1659, the focus of the group may have turned to, or included, Spinoza's own views.

This group probably helped to spur Spinoza's earliest works, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TIE) and the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (KV), which he began in the late 1650s or 1660. Both works anticipate positions in the *Ethics*, with the KV adopting something close to its structure. A work recovered with the KV and frequently labeled "Appendix 1" offers metaphysical arguments in something close to the style of the *Ethics* and in the geometric method.

A further broadening of acquaintance was probably provided by the University of Leiden, a prominent university associated closely with Descartes and Cartesianism. Steno's testimony—Steno was an anatomist—suggests that Spinoza attended dissections at the University's theatre. Another Inquisitorial witness, Thomas Solano y Robles, suggests that

Spinoza studied at the University. Meyer and Boughmeester both studied medicine at Leiden, and Meyer also studied philosophy. Finally, in a work published a few years later as an appendix to his text on Descartes, his *Metaphysical Thoughts* (CM), Spinoza frequently criticizes and, once, mentions Adriaan Heereboord (G1/279), a philosopher at Leiden. Collectively, this evidence suggests strongly that Spinoza attended lectures as well as dissections at the university.

In these years, Spinoza probably took up a new occupation, the production of lenses, telescopes, and microscopes. He seems to have been very good. Christiaan Huygens praised Spinoza in two letters in 1667, writing that the lenses in Spinoza's microscopes "have an admirable polish" and recommending that his brother use the same instrument that Spinoza uses to achieve his "very excellent" lenses. Leibniz, in a flattering letter to Spinoza in 1671 (Letter 45 in Spinoza's correspondence), praises his skill in optics, asks Spinoza to read his treatise "Note on Advanced Optics," and writes that he will be hard pressed to find a better critic. Together with his attention to anatomy, his long correspondence with Henry Oldenburgh (the secretary of the Royal Society and close associate of Robert Boyle), his discussions with Huygens and other visitors (see Letter 26), his study of Descartes, and his work in theoretical optics, Spinoza's activities suggest that he was deeply interested in and knowledgeable about the physical sciences. The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research acknowledges this status today: its highest prize is the Spinoza Prize.

Spinoza moved from Amsterdam to Rijnsberg, near Leiden, in 1661. Then he moved again, in 1663, to Voorburg, near the Hague. His extant correspondence, which begins in 1661, shows that he met Oldenburg at Rijnsberg. It also shows that Spinoza had a roommate, Johannes Casarius, a student of theology at Leiden, who studied Descartes and perhaps other authors with Spinoza (see Letters 8, 9, and 13). This house is now a museum dedicated to Spinoza, which includes early editions of Spinoza's works, many of the same editions of books that Spinoza owned, and the tools that he used in lens production.

Spinoza began both the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (DPP) and the *Ethics* at this time. Meyer's preface to the DPP suggests that the work, at least in part, grew out of Spinoza's lessons for Casarius (G1/131). Spinoza's letter to Oldenburg of August or September 1661 (Letter 2)

includes a number of definitions and propositions that are recognizably early versions of definitions and propositions of the *Ethics*.

The DPP was published in Amsterdam in 1663 together with the CM. The DPP is principally a presentation of Descartes's views in the geometrical method. Although Spinoza distances himself from Descartes's views, he also offers alternative proofs and commentaries. The CM is less clear. It is a mix of original doctrine, Cartesian doctrine, and criticism of other figures.

By 1665, Spinoza had a substantial draft of the *Ethics* as well. A letter to Willem van Blijenberg (Letter 23) in March of that year includes the earliest known reference to the *Ethics* by that title. A letter to Boumeester (Letter 28) in June shows that he was distributing the work to his friends. Spinoza suggests in the letter that the third part of the work is too long and refers to its 80th proposition. This is a basis for thinking that he conceived of the work at this time as a work of three parts. Part 3 of the finished *Ethics* ends with Proposition 59 and an appendix.

There was, however, an extended interruption in the composition of the *Ethics*. By October 1665, a letter to Oldenburg (Letter 30, fragment 2) suggests that Spinoza shifted his attention to the interpretation of scripture and what would become his *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP). From that point until the publication of the TTP in late 1669 or 1670, Spinoza's correspondence shows that, while he did not cease considering questions central to his metaphysics and probably worked more intensely than before on optics, perhaps even undertaking to write a treatise on rainbows, he did not focus on the *Ethics*.

The TTP is in many respects a theoretical and abstract work, which includes claims about scripture, the practice of religion, and states that are supposed to be perfectly general. However, it also closely concerns Spinoza's own social circumstances. A principal aim of the work, as Spinoza notes in his letter to Oldenburg, is to defend the "freedom to philosophize." Free philosophizing, more than a liberty guaranteed by law, is something in Spinoza's understanding very like what he and his friends in Amsterdam and Leiden found to hold great value, a life of engaged and social inquiry.

The freedom to philosophize was continuously and increasingly under threat from entangled religious and political forces between 1665 and 1670. There is little in Spinoza's correspondence to show what in particular

caused him to move away from the *Ethics* to work on the production and publication of the TTP. Nadler emphasizes some dramatic events. At the start of the period, for example, there was a politically charged struggle for succession in a church in Voorburg, which involved Spinoza and which may have led to him being called an atheist, a charge that he resented (see Letter 30). Such close and bitter struggle could have prompted him to focus on the TTP. In 1668, a man who was probably a friend, Adriaan Koerbagh, was imprisoned for his frank, written expression of his religious views. Koerbagh died quickly in prison, and it seems reasonable to think that Koerbagh's mistreatment and similar events prompted the publication of the TTP. Almost certainly such events, including a similar persecution of Meyer, affected Spinoza's choice to write the TTP in Latin rather than Dutch and to publish it anonymously.

The political turmoil that spurred Spinoza's publication of the TTP, which was both banned and frequently reprinted, continued to intensify in the early 1670s. War with France, which invaded in 1672, put pressure on the Dutch Republic, and the decline in influence and subsequent murder of the Grand Pensionary, Johan de Witt, marked a dangerous and less tolerant political climate in the Netherlands. Spinoza's correspondence during this time, although it is varied, frequently reveals a political philosopher critical of many of the beliefs and practices of those in power.

Spinoza moved to the Hague in 1670. The house where he settled still stands and is currently dedicated to Spinoza's works and associated books. He must have been very busy. Some of his best known and most substantial correspondence—with Leibniz and Tschirnhaus—occupied him during these years. Spinoza also renewed his correspondence with Oldenburg, and the two exchanged many letters concerned principally with the TTP. These letters also show that his work on optics continued. It is likely that Spinoza worked, in addition, on a compendium of Hebrew grammar during this time. Finally, in 1673 Spinoza appears to have made a trip to Utrecht, which was held by the invading French, at the invitation of French officers. The nature of this controversial visit remains unclear.

In addition to all of this activity, Spinoza returned to the *Ethics*. On this point, I think that Letter 48 is telling. In 1673, Spinoza received the offer of a professorship at Heidelberg on behalf of Karl Ludwig, Elector Palatine. The offer promises a generous salary and—a condition which seems to show awareness of the TTP and of the fact that Spinoza is its author—

significant freedom to philosophize, so long as that freedom is not abused “to disturb the publicly established religion” (Letter 47). In his reply, Spinoza rejects the offer:

I cannot be persuaded to embrace this excellent opportunity, even though I’ve weighed the matter for a long time. For first, I think that if I were willing to devote myself to educating young men, I would stop advancing in Philosophy. Second, I think I don’t know what the limits of that freedom of Philosophizing might be, for me not to seem to want to disturb the publicly established religion. (Letter 48)

Spinoza’s second reason for declining the professorship informs the interpretation of the TTP and Spinoza’s accounts of freedom and religion. More important as an explanation and sufficient for the decision, to my mind, is Spinoza’s first reason. He had the *Ethics* nearly finished, he had put off work on it for years, he was in poor health, and he wanted the time to finish it.

A letter to Oldenburg suggests that by July 1675 Spinoza completed the *Ethics* and intended to publish it. In the letter, Spinoza tells Oldenburg that the social climate does not seem promising:

Just as I received your letter of 22 July, I set out for Amsterdam, intending to commit to the press the book I wrote you about. While I was dealing with this, a rumor was spread everywhere that a certain book of mine about God was in the press, and that in it I tried to show that there is no God. (Letter 68)

Spinoza goes on to spell out his concerns about theologians, political conservatives, and Cartesians, who out of concern about being associated with Spinoza, “constantly denounce my opinions and writings everywhere.” Because of these uncertain and potentially dangerous circumstances, Spinoza tells Oldenburg, he decided to put off publication.

I think that it remains an important and open question whether Spinoza ever seriously conceived of the *Ethics* as a work that he wanted to publish during his lifetime. Nadler and Gullan-Whur tend to take this letter as evidence that he did. Jeroen van de Ven also cites the earlier letter to Blijenberg (Letter 23, written in March 1665), in which Spinoza refers to “my *Ethics*, which I have not yet published,” as evidence of intent to publish. Perhaps others will agree. For my part, I do not see the force of this second bit of evidence: if I say that I have not yet been to Calgary, that does not seem to me to betray any intention to go to Calgary. Letter 68 does undeniably include Spinoza’s own report of an intention to publish. I think,

however, that it would be natural for Spinoza to exaggerate the clarity of his thought process in his correspondence with a man who clearly wanted something that Spinoza was hesitant to do.

Spinoza's final years in the Hague include work on the TP, which he left unfinished, and a visit from Leibniz in November 1676. After a rapid decline, Spinoza died from a lung condition, probably tuberculosis, on February 21, 1677. Although Spinoza is not known to have left any sort of will, the speed with which his friends collected and published his works suggests that he and they had planned the publication. This is, then, strong evidence that Spinoza wanted the *Ethics* published, even if after his death: they seem to have destroyed many other writings, such as correspondence, and to have followed Spinoza's wishes in doing so. A letter from Schuller to Leibniz suggests that editions of Spinoza's works in Latin, *B.d.S. Opera Posthuma*, and in Dutch, *De Nagelate Schriften van B.d.S.*, were printed by the end of 1677.

I.3 Sources for the *Ethics*

Spinoza read and conversed widely. His influences include Aristotelianism, classic Latin literature, Medieval Jewish philosophy, Scholastic philosophy, Cartesian philosophy, and seventeenth-century Dutch philosophy and law, and each of these categories encompasses a range of authors and views. Any short list of influences, then, will be radically incomplete. Here my strategy is to offer a little depth at the expense of broad coverage. I offer accounts of several positions in Aristotle, Maimonides, and Descartes that matter to our understanding of the *Ethics*. A book on Spinoza's philosophy in general would have to include at least Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Grotius as well. Because, however, their influence shows itself most clearly in the TP and the TTP, respectively, I set these figures to one side here.

I.3.1 Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.)

While Early Modern Philosophy should be understood as a period that is highly critical of Aristotelianism—particularly in physics and metaphysics—Aristotelian issues, alternatives, vocabulary, and argumentation endured through the period. Many, even most, passages of the *Ethics* show the influence of some strand of the Aristotelian tradition.

Spinoza certainly read Aristotle in Latin translation. One volume was in his library. Much of Aristotle's influence on the *Ethics* is indirect, however, through commentaries on his views in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions preceding Spinoza. Frequently another figure—such as Maimonides, Aquinas, Suarez, or Descartes, who were all Aristotelian in some respects—matters more directly to a particular passage in the *Ethics*.

While it does not resolve the question of the provenance of Spinoza's views to find a precedent or a prompt in Aristotle, it can nevertheless be useful for understanding the *Ethics* to return to Aristotle's own writings, which remain a great source of insight and are frequently clearer than those of his commentators. Here I will discuss Aristotelian accounts of substance, the human being, final causation, and the good. Many more views influence the *Ethics*, but these I think hold particular importance.

I.3.1.1 Substance

The single doctrine that philosophers today identify most closely with the *Ethics* is Spinoza's strong metaphysical conviction that there is only one substance (1p14, 1p15). In order to evaluate this doctrine, one needs in the first instance to know what substance is. The concept is Aristotelian, and although Aristotle himself does not offer a straightforward account of substance, his discussions can make readers aware of a number of different things that one might take substance to be. Each option holds interest for a student of the *Ethics*.

Aristotle in some passages considers a substance to be a subject that has properties or predicates. Thus, as in the sentence "Socrates is snub-nosed," "Socrates" is the subject and "is snub-nosed" is the predicate, so on this view we might say that Socrates is a substance and being snub-nosed a property of the substance. So understood, Spinoza's monism would amount to the view that there is really only one thing that has properties, which seems highly implausible. In some passages, however, Aristotle suggests that a substance is a subject that cannot be predicated of anything else. Perhaps, this stronger conception makes substance monism more plausible. (For relevant discussions, see *Categories* 2a10–17 and *Metaphysics* 1028b36).

Other passages in Aristotle suggest that substance is what exists. Thus to say that Socrates is a substance is in the first instance to say that Socrates exists. This may seem difficult to reconcile with the subject-predicate

account: Socrates's snub-nosedness exists just as robustly as Socrates himself does. Perhaps, however, the doctrines are brought more closely into contact by a qualification: a substance is what exists independently of something else. On this view, we might say that Socrates exists independently of his snub-nosedness but that the property cannot exist independently of Socrates. (See *Metaphysics* 1028b4.)

Finally—and this account of substance is not, I think, easily reconciled with the others—Aristotle associates the substance of a thing with what makes it what it is, that is, with its essence. On this view, we might say that being a human being is or is an aspect of the substantiality of Socrates. An indication of the importance of this status is (on this view) that Socrates would remain Socrates if he were to lose his snub-nosedness but would not remain Socrates if he were no longer to be a human being. (See *Metaphysics* 1032b.)

While Aristotle himself does not have a clear single account of substance, the notions of substance as subject, substance as independent existent, and substance as essence all might matter to Spinoza. Certainly independence and essence are, together with substance itself, concepts central to the metaphysics of *Ethics* 1.

1.3.1.2 The Human Being

As my example of Socrates suggests, Aristotle took living beings and particularly human beings to be paradigm substances. Spinoza does use living beings as paradigm singular things (see 2d7 for this term), and he even tends to use Aristotle's favorite examples of paradigm substances, a horse and a man, in doing so (2p40s1, 4Pref.). (For Aristotle's views, see *Categories* 2a and *Metaphysics* 1033a29. A horse and a man are examples at the former.) In a dramatic departure from Aristotle, however, Spinoza contends that the human being is not a substance at all (2p10).

This feature of the *Ethics* is valuable for the interpretation of Spinoza's understanding both of substance and of human beings. It may seem difficult to understand the contention, for example, in terms of the understanding of substance as subject: could Spinoza mean that human beings (and all other ordinary things) are properties of God, just as being snub-nosed is a property of Socrates? If Spinoza does not mean this, then perhaps that is some indication that his account of substance emphasizes independent

existence more heavily. So understood, the principal implication of 2p10 is that human beings depend on something else for their existence.

The Aristotelian understanding of substance as essence may also be interesting. Aristotle uses the doctrine to classify different substances by essence. While a horse and a man, for example, will both have a vegetative essence (that is, they will both live and grow) and an animal essence (that is, they will both move), only a human being will have a rational essence. (See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a and *On the Soul* 415a.) It is rationality, above all, that makes a human being different from a horse. It is a matter of controversy whether Spinoza distinguishes among natural kinds. Certainly, a lot of what he writes about the essences of singular things suggests a very different view, on which all singular bodies are alike in such fundamental ways that there could not be kinds among them. Setting this issue to one side, however, Spinoza certainly emphasizes human rationality in his accounts of value, of what human beings share, and of the right way of living.

I.3.1.3 Final Causes and the Good

Aristotle tends to maintain that there are four ways of explaining why a thing comes to be or passes away or, as the view has come to be known, that there are four kinds of cause. (See *Physics* 194b, *Posterior Analytics* 94a, and *Metaphysics* 1013b.) Here, adapting work by Gregory Vlastos, I describe them by their most common labels, although Aristotle's Greek is not always translated in this way.

1. *A material cause* explains a thing by reference to that "out of which it comes to be," as we might say that the bowl shines because it is made of silver.
2. *A formal cause* explains a thing by reference to its form, that is, "the definition of its essence," as we might say that the angle in a semicircle is a right angle because it is half of two right angles.
3. *An efficient cause* explains a thing by reference to "the primary source of the change," as we might say that the Persians invaded Attica because the Athenians raided Sardis.
4. *A final cause* explains a thing by reference to "the end or that for the sake of which a thing is done," as we might say that a person walks because walking is healthy.

Aristotle argues that to know nature, we should study all four kinds of causes and that the last three causes frequently coincide. He is particularly concerned, however, to show the *legitimacy* and *primacy* of final causes. For example, he asks, why should we not rest with knowing the efficient

cause of plants growing roots downward? Why is it *legitimate* to say that they do so for the sake of nourishment? His response to this concern invokes the regularity of nature. Roots grow downward with regularity, and such regularity could not be the product of chance or spontaneity. Efficient causation, the argument runs, cannot explain this regularity. Final causation, however, can. Sometimes, in complicated circumstances, roots may not grow downward. They do so with regularity, however, because they grow for the sake of nourishment. One argument for the *primacy* of final causes refers, in a similar way, to the completeness of explanations. Supposing that, for any given state of root growth, I could produce a causally efficient explanation for that state, I could never trace back my account to a starting point: there would always be more to explain. However, Aristotle contends, to explain that state in terms of the plant's end in growing roots does provide a complete explanation. (See *Physics* 198a–b and *Parts of Animals* 639b.)

Aristotle's account of the good associates closely with this account of final causation: roughly, a thing's good is to reach the state for which it aims. This general account of the good of anything informs his accounts of value for human beings. Just as the characteristic end of a plant is nutrition and growth, so the characteristic activity of a human being is thought and rationality. Aristotle builds accounts of virtue and the highest good in terms of this account. To be virtuous is to use reason well, and the highest good, to live well or happily (*eudaimonia*), is a life characterized by this virtue. (See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b–1099a.)

One of the most puzzling features of the *Ethics* is Spinoza's response to this set of doctrines. Spinoza strongly criticizes final causation (1 App.; 4 Pref.). He uses Aristotelian vocabulary in his theory of value, however, and it is here (4pp20–28) that the *Ethics* most resembles a commentary on Aristotle. Spinoza's accounts of the value of reason, virtue, living well, and the highest good seem to emphasize an understanding of the human being or, specifically, the human mind, as a thing the good of which is the perfection of reason. How, though, can Spinoza reject an Aristotelian doctrine of final causation while accepting the ethical doctrines that are founded in it?

I.3.2 Maimonides (1138–1204)

Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed is an intricate work, which includes metaphysics, Scriptural interpretation, and legal theory. Maimonides discusses similar or the same topics in different parts of the book, and the different parts can seem to contradict one another. Despite these complexities, Maimonides frequently influences Spinoza's choice of topic, arguments, and word choice.

Spinoza almost certainly studied Maimonides closely from his youth onward, and his library included a copy of the *Guide*. Spinoza's responses to Maimonides are extensive and explicit in the TTP (see especially Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 10), where Spinoza is especially interested in Maimonides's accounts of imagination in prophecy and the interpretation of Scripture. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza's attention to Maimonides is not so explicit but is nevertheless clear. The case for direct influence of Maimonides on Spinoza is frequently much stronger than it can be for claims about Aristotle. Here I focus on four major points of contact: accounts of causation in God and finite things; the identity of thought and object; human purpose; and the way in which imagination leads to erroneous conceptions of God and the world.

1.3.2.1 Causation in God and Finite Things

Spinoza's account of the relation between God and finite things is in part a response to a puzzle about causal power. The conception of God as omnipotent raises the question of whether and how finite things can be causes. If they are separate from God and are genuine causes, does this compromise the conception of God as all-powerful? If all causal power whatever is God's, on the other hand, how do we explain the apparent causal activity of finite things? In some way, Spinoza's response to the dilemma is to say that finite things just are God and that their power is God's power. That response, however, raises questions of its own. If a finite thing's power is God's power, for example, how does that thing sometimes fail to act?

Maimonides's brief account of causation in finite things in a premise to Part 2 of the *Guide* offers a useful starting point for the interpretation of Spinoza. Maimonides conceives of potential existence and actual existence in terms of obstacles. He writes that if the cause of a thing is the thing itself and if there is no external obstacle to prevent this activity, then a thing will always exist. If, however, there is an external obstacle, then the thing will

not exist. Finally, and this is a critical part of an account of transitive causation (that is, of causation by a thing of an effect outside of it), Maimonides concludes that, in the latter case, we call whatever removes the external obstacle the cause of the thing that comes into existence. A finite thing, so understood, has a limited causal power to come into existence before it exists, but we will nevertheless call the final change that removes the obstacle to its existence its cause. (See Maimonides's *Guide*, Introduction to Part 2, Premise 18.)

Similar language marks Spinoza's accounts of finite things. In one of his demonstrations of God's existence (1p11d2), Spinoza argues that no obstacles impede God's existence but that obstacles do impede the existence of finite things. At the demonstration to 3p6, Spinoza's most general characterization of the causal power of finite things, he makes their power, as a finite expression of God's power, a finite power to exist. Something very like the Maimonidean conception of an external obstacle helps to explain how finite things can be self-causing and why we nevertheless refer to external causes of their existence.

1.3.2.2 The Identity of Thought and Object

In the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza characterizes human beings in terms of both extension and thought. At 2p7s, he argues that modes—human beings are modes—are unified in the same way that God is: “the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same thing substance . . . So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing.” Spinoza also writes there that “Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same.”

Maimonides makes this assertion about God. More important, perhaps, he makes the claim general in a way that approaches Spinoza's own assertion about modes: “[T]he intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object are always one and the same thing in the case of everything that is cognized *in actu*.” There is little doubt, I think, that Spinoza refers to Maimonides at 2p7s. It is a more pressing question whether reading Maimonides closely can offer insight into Spinoza's position or his arguments for it. Perhaps it can. Certainly this remains both one of the most important and also one of the most debated parts of the

Ethics. Insight into it would be extremely valuable. Maimonides's view, however, is couched in Aristotelian terminology and invokes concepts that vary across authors and uses, including those of essence, quiddity (or whatness), form, and potentiality. Despite the clear historical connection, it may be difficult to build a comparison that can yield insight into Spinoza. (See Maimonides's *Guide* 1.68.)

I.3.2.3 Human Purpose and the Criticism of Popular Imagination

Maimonides endorses a version of the Aristotelian account of final causation in finite things. Having done so, he considers whether, as is "sometimes thought," there is not one final cause in the human worship of God: "the finality of all that exists is solely the existence of the human species so that it should worship God, and all that has been made has been made for it alone . . . in order to be useful to it." Maimonides argues that this view generally is mistaken, and he criticizes particularly strongly the view that things are created for human benefit. He takes this error to be the root of "the majority of false imaginings." (See Maimonides's *Guide* 3.13 and 3.25.)

Maimonides's positive view, however, is unclear. In one passage, he contends that, for any existent, we "shall seek for it no cause or other final end whatsoever." This passage suggests that no existent has a final end, but it does not require this reading. For example, if we cannot know something's end, that is a reason to urge us not to seek knowledge of it. In another passage, he writes that if we understand every being according to what it is, we do not seek "a final end for what has not that final end; or . . . any final end for what has no final end except its own existence." Maimonides might be understood, then, to maintain any of three different views about the ends of nonhuman finite things: that they have no final ends; that those ends cannot be known; or that each has a final end only in its own existence. (See Maimonides's *Guide* 3.13 and 3.25.)

For human beings, Maimonides's view is also difficult. He does not unequivocally criticize the view that the purpose of human beings is to worship God. His association of that view with the highly imaginative and false view that other things are made to be useful to us suggests, however, that it also is imaginative and suspect. His emphasis on existence as the only purpose of all finite things likewise suggests that, because we are finite things, our purpose cannot be the worship of God. However, in a chapter

near the end of the *Guide*, he positively endorses a version of this doctrine. The purpose of the chapter, Maimonides writes, is to explain the worship of one who has apprehended God and to guide such a person “toward achieving this worship, which is the end of man.” This, then, is a topic on which Maimonides may at least appear to contradict himself. It may be, however, that he at once rejects a highly imaginative understanding of human purpose in terms of the worship of God and accepts a highly intellectual doctrine that can be described in similar terms. What worship is and what is worshipped may differ in the doctrines. (See Maimonides’s *Guide* 3.51.)

Spinoza uses language very similar to Maimonides in his own criticism of ordinary belief at 1 Appendix. He contends that men commonly suppose that “God has made all things for man and man that he might worship God” (G2/78). In assessing this and related errors, Spinoza argues that they arise because people “do not understand the nature of things but only imagine them.” Spinoza also emphasizes existence as the object of striving of ordinary things, including human beings, at the beginning of *Ethics* 3. The end of the *Ethics*, finally, like the end of the *Guide*, offers an account of the best human life, which is founded in the knowledge of God and the love of God (see 4p28, 4app4, and 5p32–5p33). The place of final causation in the *Ethics* is, however, a central and unresolved issue in its interpretation. The *Ethics* includes also intricate and distinctive accounts of God, which make Spinoza’s debt to Maimonides in these passages difficult to state precisely.

I.3.3 Descartes (1596–1650)

Descartes is the single most direct influence on the *Ethics*. His work—including *The Principles of Philosophy*, *The Meditations*, *The Passions of the Soul*, and his correspondence—contains many lessons for a student of the *Ethics*, and, as we have seen, Spinoza began work on the *Ethics* while he was deeply engaged with the DPP. Descartes’s writings also informed the work of Spinoza’s acquaintances and, in that way, influenced Spinoza indirectly. Here I discuss Descartes’s views of substance, attribute, and mode; will and intellect; and the control of passion.

I.3.3.1 Substance, Attribute, and Mode

Descartes characterizes substances, attributes, and modes in a helpful way at 1.51–56 of the *Principles of Philosophy*. His account of substance there emphasizes two aspects of familiar, Aristotelian views: independent existence and essence. Descartes contends at 1.51 that, strictly speaking, a substance depends on nothing else for its existence and that, again in this strict sense of “substance,” only God is a substance. He also permits a looser sense of “substance” on which a substance depends upon nothing but God for its existence. In this looser sense, particular minds, such as human minds, and perhaps also particular bodies may be called substances.

Descartes argues that any substance has one principal attribute that “constitutes its nature and essence” and that every other property of the substance is a mode of that attribute. Thus, particular instances of imagination, sensation, and will are modes of thought, which is the attribute of a thinking substance, a mind. Likewise, particular shapes and motions are modes of extension, which is the attribute of an extended substance, a body.

Precisely understood, Descartes writes at *Principles* 1.56, an attribute belongs to a substance without variation. Modes, by contrast, are variations—modifications—to things that are substances in the looser sense. Thus Descartes’s wax in the familiar example of Meditation 2 has its particular size, shape, color, and other modes before it is warmed, and all of these change after it is warmed, but it always retains extension, its attribute. God, however, Descartes argues, is invariable and therefore has no modes but only attributes. (See also Descartes’s letter to Mersenne of April 26, 1643, AT 3 648–649, and *Principles* 1.22.)

Substance, attribute, and mode are likewise basic concepts of metaphysics in the *Ethics*. In some basic doctrines, Spinoza finds reason to follow Descartes. Perhaps he does so even in his substance monism: God is the only substance, strictly speaking, for Descartes. Many further points of contact with Descartes come from the emphasis upon thought and extension in the *Ethics*, where they are the only named attributes and, as in Descartes although in a very different way, principal components of the human being.

Where Spinoza departs from Descartes—as where he argues that a human being is not a substance—it can be helpful to ask whether he does so because of some further basic conviction that he does not share with Descartes or because he takes Descartes in some respect to have drawn the wrong conclusions from fundamental convictions that the two philosophers

share. It can also be helpful to be mindful of the details of Descartes's accounts of substance, attribute, and mode where questions arise about Spinoza's understanding of the concepts. For example, Descartes's claims that each substance has a *principal* attribute at 1.53 and that an attribute is an invariant property of a substance at 1.56 permit a view on which a given substance, even in the loose sense, may have more than one attribute.

I.3.3.2 Will and Intellect

Descartes presents will as, at once, a cognitive faculty, by which we can affirm or deny, and a practical faculty, by which we can pursue or avoid. He argues in Meditation 4 that God and human beings alike have perfect freedom of the will and that it is in this respect that we most resemble God. Divine freedom, he notes elsewhere, nevertheless differs from our own. In creating the world, for example, God is perfectly free. The choice, Descartes insists, is not guided by a prior understanding of the good. God does not create things because they are good. Instead, what is good is good because God makes it. Nor is divine choice restricted by eternal truths. The internal angles of any triangle are equal to two right angles because God chooses that they are so. Perfection of the divine will (and power) is evident in a completely free creation. (See Meditation 4, AT 7 57–58 and the Sixth Replies, AT 7 431–432.)

Human will in cognition is not so radically free as divine will because human beings do have guides to belief as well as inclinations to believe. Descartes maintains that we ought to assent to our clear and distinct ideas and that we are strongly inclined to do so. He maintains that this—inclining strongly to what one ought to do—is a kind of freedom. If it is, it differs from the sort of freedom ascribed to God, for whom there is no such external standard for willing well. Descartes describes another kind of inclination as well, which is not such a standard but a source of error. Habits formed in childhood give us strong inclinations to assent to ideas, even when they are not clear and distinct. We err when we misuse our freedom of the will in assenting to such ideas: “Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin” (AT 7 58).

In these views, Descartes distinguishes will from intellect or understanding. For the human case, this is perhaps best understood in terms of mental activities. Thus, even if I do ordinarily assent to any of my clear

and distinct ideas, the action of assent, Descartes maintains, differs from the action of understanding. The position is most clear, and perhaps most plausible, in the case of falsity. Descartes's view implies that one can understand what it would be for a winged horse to exist without at the same time assenting to the idea that a winged horse exists. These two activities—assenting to clear and distinct ideas and refraining from assent to ideas that are not clear and distinct—are two sorts of willing rightly. In both, we avoid error.

Ethics 1 and 2 culminate in arguments against Cartesian conceptions of will. They are naturally read as refutations of Cartesian accounts of will in God and in human beings, respectively. At 1p32 Spinoza contends that will is not a free cause but only a necessary one and, in a corollary, that God does not produce any effect by freedom of the will. Turning to the case of human will at the end of *Ethics* 2, at 2p49c and a scholium that follows it, Spinoza rejects and criticizes the Cartesian distinction between will and intellect. For example, he asks: “what is perceiving a winged horse other than affirming wings of a horse?” (2p49cs G2/134).

Although the contrast here also may also appear to be stark, the relation of Spinoza's view to Descartes's may be more difficult to establish than it is in the case of divine will. Descartes's remark that God's freedom differs from human freedom qualifies his accounts of human freedom, and it may do so in ways that make Spinoza's accounts of human belief and knowledge similar to Cartesian accounts even where his accounts of divine will are not. Notably, Spinoza will agree that we avoid error and act well when we act on the basis of our clear and distinct ideas and that we are prone to error and act badly when we act on the basis of those of our ideas that are not clear and distinct.

1.3.3.3 The Control of Passion

We are inclined by nature, on Descartes's view, to do what is good for the body and to avoid what is bad for the body. Passions make us feel sad in the presence of and averse to some external things and feel joy in and desire others. The passions that motivate us by nature are, however, imperfect. We can, Descartes argues, develop new habits that improve upon nature, and in them we can will what we judge through reasoning to be good and evil. We can also recognize that there is a kind of joy that is active, that belongs only to the soul, and that cannot be harmed by anything corporeal. It arises from

action in accordance with what one judges to be best. Our judgments of the good guide practical will as judgments of clarity and distinctness guide will in cognition. (See *Passions of the Soul* 2.56, 2.57, 2.137, 2.91, and 2.148.)

Mind-body interaction complicates the account. Descartes must explain how the body can be a source of some kind of passions in the mind and how the mind can move the body. He addresses these demands by maintaining that mind-body interaction takes place by means of a small gland in the brain, the pineal gland. At *Passions of the Soul* 1.50, Descartes argues that by changing the associations between certain movements of the pineal gland and certain thoughts in the mind we are able to acquire habits different from our natural inclinations and so acquire a power over our passions.

Spinoza's theory of the passions resembles Descartes's in many respects (and both resemble older, especially Stoic, theories). However, as we have seen, Spinoza rejects human freedom of the will and mind-body interaction. At the Preface to *Ethics* 5, Spinoza cites *Passions* 1.50, describes Descartes's account of how the passions may be controlled, and rejects it forcefully. Spinoza introduces *Ethics* 5 as an alternative to the Cartesian account of what the human mind can do to resist the influence of the passions. As in the case of his rejection of Cartesian views about error in cognition, however, Spinoza may overstate his own rejection of Descartes. The methods that he introduces for the control of passion in *Ethics* 5 resemble Cartesian methods for avoiding cognitive error.

Recommended Reading

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Note: For editions of Spinoza and Descartes used in this Guide, please refer to “Texts and Abbreviations” in the front matter.

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1

One Infinite Substance

Ethics 1 concerns the nature of and relations among the most basic sorts of existents. Although the part's definitions and axioms appear to be hypothetical, describing what it would be, for example, for a thing to be a substance, Spinoza nevertheless arrives at striking conclusions about what does in fact exist. For example, he argues that there exists just one, absolutely infinite substance (1p14) and that whatever else exists is in this substance (1p15). From this view, which I will call Spinoza's *substance monism*, he works toward strong general claims about the world, including the claims that all finite things exist and have effects only if they themselves are determined to do so by other finite existents, his *determinism* (1p28), and that what exists could not have been produced in any way other than the way it has been produced, his *necessitarianism* (1p33).

Spinoza calls the one infinite substance "God." That label may seem misleading, if one thinks of God as an agent who is to be praised for acting well in choosing to make the world in one way rather than another. Spinoza takes ordinary people and some other philosophers to regard God as such an agent, but he also takes views of this kind to be mistaken. In the course of *Ethics* 1, he discusses elements of this common conception and related philosophical views in scholia (1p15s, 1p17s, 1p33s2). In an appendix, beyond simply arguing that the views are wrong, he explains the origins of the mistake, why it is common, and why it is harmful.

The Appendix offers readers an initial hint about what Spinoza takes to be at stake for human beings in the highly abstract metaphysics of *Ethics* 1. Later in the work, Spinoza will argue that the knowledge of God, the one infinite substance of *Ethics* 1, is the highest good of the human mind (4p28, 4App4). Although Spinoza's metaphysics holds interest on its own account, then, it also occupies a central place in his theory of value. Just as (what Spinoza takes to be) the common, mistaken conception of God founds

common, mistaken conceptions of value, so an adequate understanding of the one infinite substance founds a better understanding of the human good.

This chapter introduces these principal elements of *Ethics* 1 together with issues that arise for their interpretation. It includes sections on the definitions and axioms that open *Ethics* 1; on the argument to substance monism at 1p14–1p15; and on the arguments to determinism (1p28) and necessitarianism that follow (1p33). Spinoza’s views in metaphysics are strong, frequently counterintuitive, and intricate. They hold great independent interest. The final section here, on *Ethics* 1 Appendix, emphasizes the additional interest that Spinoza’s metaphysics holds in virtue of its prominence in the accounts of the human condition and value that Spinoza builds upon it in the parts of the *Ethics* that follow.

1.1 The Definitions and Axioms of *Ethics* 1

The geometrical method of the *Ethics* confronts its reader bluntly. Without preface, the work begins with eight definitions and seven axioms that serve as a basis for the propositions that follow. For a student who is new to the *Ethics*, the definitions and axioms can be mystifying and intriguing. For scholars, they are an enduring challenge: whatever we contend about propositions that arise later in the *Ethics* has to accommodate these foundational commitments. Here, I offer an initial account of the definitions and axioms before turning to several prominent questions that they raise.

At *Ethics* 1, Spinoza defines “cause of itself,” “thing finite in its own kind,” “substance,” “attribute,” “mode,” “God,” “free thing,” and “eternity.” With the exceptions, perhaps, of “mode” and “eternity,” each of these is a term for a thing: a thing that causes itself; a finite thing; a thing that is in itself; and so on. This point may seem uninteresting—is it so surprising that Spinoza would want to define terms that refer to different kinds of things?—until one turns to Spinoza’s axioms. The axioms do not characterize particular sorts of things, and this distinguishes them sharply from the definitions. Instead, the axioms tend to characterize all things indifferently. Possible exceptions include 1a3 and 1a4, which explicitly concern causes and effects, and 1a6, which concerns true ideas and their objects. This is a striking feature of the rest of the axioms, however, which refer to things in generic pronouns such as *omnia* (“whatever”), *id* (“what”), *quae* (“things”), and *quicquid* (“a thing”). None of the axioms incorporate any of the eight

defined terms. Roughly and imperfectly, then, the definitions of *Ethics* 1 characterize the basic sorts of things that matter to the argument of the *Ethics* and the axioms are truths about all things. They therefore govern the things introduced in the definitions.

Spinoza asserts early in *Ethics* 1, at 1p4dem, that there is nothing other than substances and their modes and that (in some sense that will need to be determined) substances are the same as their attributes. This quick glance ahead puts a spotlight on 1d3–1d5, the definitions of “substance,” “mode,” and “attribute”:

1d3: By ‘substance’ I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.

1d4: By ‘attribute’ I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.

1d5: By ‘mode’ I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.

Given the views of 1p4dem, the other definitions must concern these three basic kinds of existent, and the axioms must govern them.

Proceeding from this clue—and, again, glancing at the argument ahead—the sort of thing that Spinoza takes to be a cause of itself in the sense given at 1d1 will be a substance (1p7dem), so God will also be self-caused. This suggests that modes, then, are not self-caused. Causation in attributes and modes is a central, difficult issue in the interpretation of Spinoza’s metaphysics, and it will be the focus of §1.3 in this chapter (see also §2.1, §3.1, and §3.2). Very briefly, however, several texts suggest that God causes all modes (1p15, 1p18, 1p25).

The second definition characterizes some important modes. At 1p8dem, Spinoza denies that a substance could be finite in the sense of 1d2, that is, finite in its own kind. Anything, then, that is finite in this sense will be a mode. Spinoza’s example following 1d2 offers insight into what he means by “finite its own kind” in the definition. He writes: “For example, a body is called finite because we always conceive another that is greater. Thus a thought is limited by another thought. But a body is not limited by a thought nor a thought by a body.” The attributes that Spinoza eventually names are thought and extension (2pp1–2). The best examples of things that are finite in their own kind, then, are finite modes of thought and extension, that is,

ideas and bodies. In short, 1d2 characterizes the most ordinary everyday things.

Note, however, that when one relies upon 1p8dem for a characterization of 1d2, it follows only that whatever is finite in its own kind will be a mode. The demonstration does not suggest the converse, that any mode will be a thing that is finite in its own kind. Spinoza exploits this point at 1p21–1p23 (1p21dem cites 1d2) in introducing his difficult and interesting account of infinite modes (see §1.3 here). There are, therefore, some things in Spinoza’s ontology that are not the causes of themselves but are also not finite, a tricky, transitional category.

Definitions seven and eight can be introduced in terms of the categories already established. Glancing ahead again, Spinoza argues at 1p17c2, citing 1d7, that God alone is free. Because God is a substance, this implies that no mode is free, a point that Spinoza emphasizes in his ethics. *Ethics* 4, “Of Human Bondage” is a detailed account of how a particular kind of mode, a human being, is unfree. Only a substance can be completely free. The demonstrations to 1p19, 1p20, and 1p23 cite 1d8’s definition of “eternity.” Spinoza characterizes God and God’s attributes as eternal at 1p19. At 1p20, the eternity of God’s attributes is a premise in the argument to the conclusion that God’s existence and essence are one and the same. Finally, at 1p23dem, he suggests that infinite modes are eternal. Freedom, then, characterizes substance alone, but eternity tracks the subtler distinction between the infinite and the finite. Attributes and some modes, together with substance, will be eternal. This suggests that finite modes—again, ordinary bodies and ideas are finite modes—are not eternal, although Spinoza will have reason to qualify even this finding by the end of the *Ethics*.

To summarize this initial account of the definitions, 1d3–1d5 introduce the basic elements of Spinoza’s ontology: substance, attribute, and mode. God, strictly understood, has infinite attributes. By 1d4 an attribute is something like an essence of God (what precisely an attribute is will be a subject of §1.1.2 and §2.1.1). Nevertheless, Spinoza treats substance and attribute, in many contexts, as the same. The other definitions, then, may be understood to apply to substances, modes, or both. Spinoza uses 1d1, 1d6, and 1d7 to characterize substance. At 1d2, he characterizes some modes, those most familiar to us. Finally, 1d8 characterizes substance, attributes, and some unfamiliar, infinite modes.

I have read a good deal into the definitions in arriving at this summary. As I have presented the definitions here, however, the universe, on Spinoza's account, includes the following: God, a substance that is a cause of itself and of all other things; God's attributes, such as thought and extension, which we are to know as God's essence; and a variety of modes, which are everything else. All modes are in God and conceived through God. Some, however, are infinite and eternal, whereas others are finite in their own kind.

Although the axioms of *Ethics* 1 do not mention the terms defined, they offer further accounts of many of the same relations that Spinoza uses in the definitions. By this means, they give Spinoza a basis for demonstrating further propositions about substances, modes, and attributes. For example, 1a1 and 1a2 are truths about being in and being conceived through respectively. These are the two relations that Spinoza invokes at 1d3 and 1d5. The axioms, then, provide two different routes to the conclusion that everything is either a substance or a mode. Because whatever exists is either in itself or in another (1a1) and because whatever is in itself is a substance (1d3) while whatever is in another is a mode (1d5), everything is either a substance or a mode. Similarly, because what is conceived through itself is a substance (1d3) while whatever is conceived through another is a mode (1d5), everything is, by 1a2, either a substance or a mode. The arguments raise difficult interpretative questions. What is the point of offering these two routes to the same conclusion? What does Spinoza take to be the relation between these relations of being in (or inherence) and being conceived through? Does he take it to be true that, whenever A is in B, A is also conceived through B? While these and other questions are pressing, at a first glance it is clear that the axioms are relevant to the definitions because they offer truths about things that enter into the sorts of relations that Spinoza invokes in the definitions.

Another axiom, 1a7, also governs conception, but it relates conception helpfully to existence: "If a thing can be conceived as not existing, its essence does not involve existence." At 1d1, Spinoza equates "that whose essence involves existence" and "that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing." It is tempting then to think that he should endorse a biconditional at 1a7, rather than a conditional, making what can be conceived as not existing the same (in this sense) as what has an essence that does not involve existence. Emphasizing 1d1, 1a7 at least strongly

suggests a further connection between conception and causation: what can be conceived as not existing is not self-caused. Certainly 1d1 and 1a7 have prominent roles in what I will call (§1.2) the causal strand of argument in the opening of *Ethics* 1, which runs through 1p7 and 1p11 and in which Spinoza argues that God exists.

Axioms three and four concern cause and effect explicitly and offer bases for thinking further about 1d1 and 1d7. For example 1a4 concerns kinds of relations, depending and (once again) involving, and suggests that these two relations have some close association with causation: if A causes B, then the knowledge of B depends upon the knowledge of A and the knowledge of B involves the knowledge of A.

A seminal use of 1a4 in combination with 1a5 (“Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, *or* the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other”) offers hints useful for understanding these relations. Spinoza argues on the basis of the two axioms that causes must have something in common with their effects (1p3). In the demonstration, Spinoza contends that, supposing two things have nothing in common, they cannot, by 1a5, be understood through one another; in that case, though, by 1a4, one could not cause the other. The argument suggests that Spinoza takes the relation expressed at 1a5, “B is understood through (*intelligi per*) A” or, alternatively, “the concept of B involves the concept of A,” to be the same as that expressed by “the knowledge of B depends upon the knowledge of A,” “the knowledge of B involves the knowledge of A” or both at 1a4. Unfortunately, Spinoza only uses 1a5 once in the *Ethics*, in this demonstration. Further uses might have taught us a great deal about the relation, conception, that arises so frequently in the definitions of *Ethics* 1 (1d1, 1d3, 1d5, and 1d8).

The sixth axiom offers new challenges in the form of familiar, powerful terminology that is nevertheless new to the *Ethics*: “a true idea must agree with its object.” (*Idea vera debet cum suo ideato convenire.*) “Idea,” “true,” “object,” and “agreement” are terms of great importance to philosophy generally and to early modern philosophy in particular. Their isolated appearance here is odd from the point of view of Spinoza’s systematicity. I find the discussion of ideas—the term “idea” had and has many very different senses—without any preceding definition especially problematic. Nevertheless we may take this axiom to clarify other terminology in the

definitions and axioms. Conception as, conception through, knowledge, understanding, and intellectual perception all seem to invoke thoughtful action of some kind, and 1a2, 1a4, and 1a5 use these relations to associate knowledge or possible knowledge with existence. In arguing that a true idea agrees with its object, Spinoza gives readers a term that might refer to all of these things. Spinoza does not define “idea” until 2d3. Where he does so, he makes ideas concepts. That is a reason for taking any instance of conception, knowledge, understanding, or intellectual perception to be an idea. So understood, 1a4 suggests that an idea, I_2 , that agrees with an object, O_2 , which is an effect (perhaps a mode of body), depends upon and involves another idea, I_1 , that, in turn, agrees with an object, O_1 , which is a cause. That is, it suggests that there is an order of ideas ($I_1 \dots I_2$) that is like the order of cause and effect in objects ($O_1 \dots O_2$). This is a thesis that Spinoza takes up in the opening propositions of *Ethics* 2 (see §2.1 below).

1.1.1 What Kind of Claims Are Spinoza’s Definitions?

Here are three of the many different things that a definition might be:

A lexical definition is an attempt to capture at least some element of what speakers ordinarily understand by a term.

A stipulative definition specifies the meaning of a term within a given context, such as a philosophical or logical work, and need not agree with ordinary understandings or any other meanings of the term.

A real definition is an attempt to capture the nature of a term’s referent.

So understood, these types of definition reflect authors’ purposes. Definitions of different kinds, then, might coincide if an author has a number of different purposes at once. Thus, if speakers ordinarily mean by “gold” the element with atomic number 79 *and* if “gold” refers to the thing the nature of which is to be such an element *and* if I posit this as the meaning of “gold” wherever the term appears in my argument *and*, finally, if it is my purpose to convey all of these things in my definition, then my definition might be lexical, stipulative, and real at once.

The definitions of *Ethics* 1 are, I think, all stipulative. Their relation to established understanding and to the natures of referents is less clear. In my view, they are in all cases (perhaps with the exception, again, of 1d8) real

definitions. While their relation to received meanings deserves careful attention, the definitions are not lexical.

To start with the most straightforward point, all of the definitions of *Ethics* 1 are well-regarded as stipulative in the sense that I have given that label here. Spinoza offers them within the context of the *Ethics*, and readers may then take them to have that specific meaning wherever they appear in the formal apparatus. Stipulative definitions need not, however, be merely stipulative. They may have further relations to ordinary use or to the real nature of the defined terms' referents. The question of whether they do so in the *Ethics* is less straightforward.

While most, perhaps all, of the definitions of the *Ethics* 1 are not lexical, their relation to conventional meaning matters to Spinoza and perhaps matters in different ways for different definitions. Some capture something close to ordinary understandings, or else to conventional philosophical understandings, of the terms. The definitions of the fundamental terms of Spinoza's metaphysics, "substance," "mode," and "attribute" in *Ethics* 1d3–5, for example, resemble Descartes's accounts of those terms in the *Principles of Philosophy* 1.51–56.

Subtle differences between texts can be important, and a complete case for this view would depend upon a careful comparison of the *Principles*, which emphasizes dependence and concurrence, and the definitions of *Ethics* 1, which emphasize different terminology. Nevertheless, these definitions, while stipulative, clearly also at least resemble versions of accepted meanings of the terms. They might be called "lexical" if there is reason to think that in them Spinoza intends to capture some accepted meaning. Perhaps, for example, Spinoza means in them to build an argument *ad hominem* (that is, an argument from an interlocutor's own assumptions) showing that Descartes's premises lead not to his but to other conclusions. This is a powerful and well-substantiated interpretation of the argument to substance monism in *Ethics* 1. If it is correct, then beyond specifying what the terms mean in his own argument, Spinoza must have meant also to capture Cartesian understandings of the terms.

In other cases Spinoza's definitions refine or reform ordinary use. The definition of "God" at 1d6 is an example of a definition that reforms what Spinoza takes to be ordinary understanding. On a common understanding of God, Spinoza suggests following Maimonides, God is a person who directs all things, makes all things for man, and makes man for the worship of God

(1App, G2/78). His definition of “God,” however, bears little resemblance to what he takes to be the ordinary understanding:

1d6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses eternal and infinite essence. (Translation modified.)

Rather, this is the beginning of an effort to correct what Spinoza takes to be a common and grave error. Even if none of Spinoza’s definitions in the *Ethics* is well-regarded as lexical, these points show that accepted meanings and ordinary use inform the definitions. What ordinary speakers mean by terms in wide use and what earlier philosophers mean by technical terms matters to Spinoza even where his definitions are not attempts to characterize such use.

Turning now to the question of whether the definitions of *Ethics* 1 are real, although commentators, including myself, tend to agree that they are, the evidence for this conclusion is not absolutely decisive. First, while some of the evidence for this view may be found within the *Ethics*, at 1p8s2, much of it is found in works outside of the *Ethics*. These include Letter 34, to Hudde; KV§1.7; TIE §§95–96; and Letter 60, to Tschirnhaus. It is not always clear that Spinoza maintains the same position in his different works, and the relevance of these works to the interpretation of the *Ethics* must be defended. Second, although Spinoza surely seeks to capture *some* truths in his definitions, there are many other truths that one might capture. The attempt to capture the nature of thing, which is characteristic of real definition, does seem to commit an author to a very narrow conception of definition as well as to a substantive view about the things defined: they have natures.

My own view, as I have said, is that the definitions of *Ethics* 1 are real definitions. This issue, however, is a fascinating one and worth the effort to address. Beyond the interesting textual problems that stand in the way of a clear defense, the philosophical issues—how a thing is generated; how the understanding of a thing relates to its existence; the relation between the causation of a thing and a thing’s nature—are central to *Ethics* 1. The attempt to understand the nature of Spinoza’s definitions stands, then, to yield deep insights into his metaphysics.

1.1.2 What Do the Definitions Tell Us about Substance, Mode, and Attribute?

Spinoza's three most basic sorts of existent—substance, mode, and attribute—cannot be well understood without a careful study of the *Ethics* at least through 2p13, after which Spinoza focuses more narrowly on the topic of the human being. Nevertheless, attention to some of the relations that feature in the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 1 can help readers to reach an initial understanding of the three sorts of existents and to be aware of the difficulty presented by the notion of attribute.

We have seen that Spinoza defines “substance” (1d3) and “mode” (1d5) in terms of the relations of being-in and being-conceived-through, which, in turn, 1a1 and 1a2 explicate. We have also seen that one can, in two different ways, move from these premises to the conclusion that there is nothing that exists apart from substances and modes.

These arguments do not mention attributes, but they do constrain the notion of attribute: they suggest that, if attributes exist, they must themselves be either substances or modes. Spinoza, though, does not use the relations of conceiving through and being in to define “attribute.” Instead he defines “attribute” (1d4) in terms of different, complex relations, which I mark with parentheses because one is nested in the other: “By attribute I understand what (the intellect perceives as (what constitutes the essence of substance)).” The inner set of parentheses may put attributes in a relation of constituting: an attribute constitutes the essence of substance. This may not be the entirety of Spinoza's view, however, if the outer parentheses matter. They suggest that an attribute is what the intellect perceives as entering into this relation with the essence of substance. This additional terminology does not obviously help to address the status of attributes. Neither these relations—perceiving and constituting—nor “the intellect” appears in the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 1 outside of 1d4.

The definition of “God” offers more information, in the form of yet another relation. God is “a substance, consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.” On this account, each attribute of God enters into an expressing relation: it expresses an essence. This further characterization helps, I think, to clarify 1d4's complex expression. “Essence” enters into both formulations. At 1d4, as we have seen, an attribute is what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of it. At 1d6, in terms of a different relation (consisting of) and, granted, with respect to God alone, the relation of attribute to essence is simpler: each attribute expresses it. The definitions at least suggest that the

expression relation is the same as the complex relation that enters into 1d4. It is the same, after all, with respect to God, which, it will turn out, is the only substance. If this is correct, Spinoza might have written, equivalently, at 1d4: “by attribute I understand what expresses the essence of a substance.”

Although none of these relations that, in the definitions, are peculiar to attributes—perception, expression, constituting, or consisting—arise in the axioms of *Ethics* 1, we can nevertheless arrive at an initial account of substance, attribute, and mode from this analysis of the relations. Anything that exists, Spinoza maintains, will be a substance or a mode. The demonstration to 1p15 confirms this point directly and, as we would expect, by means of a reference to 1a1: “[E]xcept for substances and modes, there is nothing.” The demonstration to 1p4 does also, and it is perhaps more precise because it incorporates that difficult notion, the intellect: “[O]utside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections.” (As 1d5 shows, Spinoza takes affections and modes to be the same.) Substance and mode may be understood in terms either of the being-in or the conceived-through relation. For example, Spinoza will maintain that God, a substance, exists in itself and is conceived through itself, and he will also maintain that the human body, a mode, exists in God and may be conceived through God. In addition, understood without reference (or with only tacit reference) to intellect, attributes express the essence of substance. Because everything is a substance or a mode, an attribute apart from intellect must simply be a substance or a mode. The close association of attribute with substance suggests that it is substance (although a great deal more will have to be said; see §2.1.1). Thus, the human body exists in extension, an attribute, and may be conceived through extension; the human mind exists in thought, an attribute, and may be conceived through thought. In each case the attribute expresses the essence of God or, equivalently, just is God, outside of the intellect.

The reference to intellect at 1d4 and again at 1p4 suggests, however, that attributes may be distinguished from substance in some way. Indeed, they must: Spinoza will take it to be incorrect to say, for example, that the human body exists in and may be conceived through thought, even though thought is an attribute of God. A central goal for the interpretation of Spinoza’s metaphysics, then, is to understand the meaning of “intellect” at

1d4, attributes, and, what turns on these issues, the circumstances under which an attribute may be identified with substance.

1.1.3 Is Any Relation Fundamental in the *Ethics*?

As we have seen, Spinoza mentions many relations in the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 1 that he does not define or otherwise discuss independently. Readers have to understand the relations, then, through Spinoza's use of relevant terms in the *Ethics*. The questions of how these relations relate to one another and, in particular, of whether some reduce to others arise immediately with the axioms and definitions.

The complexity of this issue can be shown by the number and variety of relations that appear in the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 1. Building a list of relations requires some interpretation because of Spinoza's use of prepositions and different verb forms. Even this list, then, is controversial. As I understand the definitions, however, the relations that Spinoza refers to in them include the following:

- A causes B (*causa*: 1d1, 1a3, 1a4)
- A involves B (*involvere*: 1d1, 1d6exp, 1a4, 1a5, 1a7)
- A is conceived as B (a form of *concipere* with a participle: 1d1, 1a7)
- A limits B (*terminare*: 1d2)
- A is in B (*in esse*: 1d3, 1d5, 1a1)
- A is conceived through B (*concipere per*: 1d3, 1d5, 1a2)
- A perceives B (*percipere*: 1d4)
- A constitutes B (*constituere*: 1d4)
- A consists of B (*constare*: 1d6)
- A expresses B (*exprimere*: 1d6, 1d6exp)
- A determines B (*determinare*: 1d7, 1a3—note the similarity to *terminare*)
- A follows from B (*sequor*: 1d8, 1a3)

As my parenthetical citations indicate, many of these relations also matter to the axioms. Where the axioms offer further accounts of relations mentioned in the definitions, they stand to help readers to better understand the relations and therefore also the definitions. The axioms also include a further three relations, however, and so further complicate the task of interpretation:

- A depends on B (*dependere*: 1a4)
- A is understood through B (*intelligi per*: 1a5)
- A agrees with B (*convenire*: 1a6)

A great deal of work on Spinoza's metaphysics concerns the question of the extent to which different relations reduce to one another. For example, if "A is in B" really just means "B causes A," then the relation between substance and mode in Spinoza may be very similar to that between God and created substance in Descartes: God causes us, but we are not literally in God. If it does not, then the views may differ dramatically. It may also be that conception is the fundamental relation for Spinoza. Spinoza's uses of 1a4 may require us to understand Spinoza to maintain a biconditional reading of 1a4 on which it means that A causes B if and only if the knowledge of B depends upon the knowledge of A. Such a view, as Charles Jarrett has noted, tends to reduce causation to conception. Alternatively, if, reasonably but again controversially, one takes understanding and conceiving to be the same thing, then one might use Spinoza's axioms to arrive at the equivalence (in the sense of similar biconditionals) of causation, conception, and being in. Of course, more must be said to justify the foundational role of conception among these three notions. Perhaps it is causation, instead, that matters most basically to Spinoza. One may certainly maintain, moreover, that biconditionals obtain but that genuine reduction is something different and stronger.

There are, as this list shows, many further questions that Spinoza's relations raise. Expression holds particular importance for understanding Spinoza's accounts of attributes and of essence. To my mind, the relation between causation and limitation also holds particular importance for the interpretation of Spinoza's understanding of ordinary things (see §1.2.4).

On the pressing question of reduction, my own inclination is to think that each of these relations differs from all of the others, as Spinoza understands it, in some sense. My principal reason for this view is that Spinoza frequently identifies or nearly identifies things while still maintaining that those things differ from one another in a subtle way. To take the most familiar example, he maintains that the human mind and the human body are "one and the same thing." Nevertheless many things are true of the human body—for example, that it affects and is affected by other bodies—that are not true of the human mind. Relations that Spinoza mentions frequently together, such as being in and being conceived through, may likewise differ. This reason, so stated, sets out a criterion for showing that one relation is identical to another: for the relations to be identical, one should be able to replace one term for another in any given context and

preserve the meaning of the claim. To give an example that meets this criterion, although these are not terms for relations, “mode” and “affection” really are, 1d5 suggests, synonymous terms in Spinoza’s use.

1.2 Existence: 1p1–1p15

To judge by Spinoza’s use of the formal apparatus in his demonstrations, there are three somewhat distinct strands of argument in *Ethics* 1pp1–15. A first, causal argument has a basis in 1a4 and 1a5:

1a4: The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.

1a5: Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, *or* the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.

By means of these axioms, Spinoza develops a causal likeness principle, on which causes must have something in common with their effects (1p3), and builds toward a conclusion on which substance (1p7) and so God (1p11) is self-caused. A second strand of argument, which emphasizes inherence and conception, starts from the definitions of “substance” as what is in itself and conceived through itself (1d3) and “mode” as what is in another and conceived through another (1d5) together with 1a1:

1a1: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another.

From these roots, Spinoza eventually arrives at the conclusions that whatever exists is in God and that nothing can be or be conceived without God (1p15).

Finally, a third strand of argument concerns limitation. It emphasizes the notions of finitude and infinitude and Spinoza’s definition of “finite in its own kind”:

1d2: That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature.

From this understanding of limitation, Spinoza offers an account of the difference between the infinite and the finite (1p8 and its scholia) and defends his substance monism against a likely objection, on which God cannot be extended because God would then be divisible and so corruptible (1p12).

These strands are not wholly independent. Indeed, the ways in which Spinoza draws upon views about causation, inherence, conception, and limitation in the course of defending other views present some of the most interesting aspects of his metaphysics. Here I present an overview of each of the strands before turning to some pressing questions.

To begin with the causal strand of argument, a view, like 1p3, on which things that have nothing in common also cannot causally interact may be intuitively plausible. We might think, for example, that only a body, something which can collide with and push another body, could affect it. Spinoza, however, depends upon something more than such an intuition in defending 1p3. Spinoza's causal axiom, 1a4, is notoriously difficult to understand because of its vague and only infrequently appearing terms for relations: "involves" and "depends." In the absence of a detailed interpretation of 1a4, one may say, vaguely, that Spinoza's view is that in order to understand an effect one must understand its cause. Taking this provisional interpretation of 1a4, Spinoza's argument in the demonstration to 1p3 suggests that because (1) one cannot understand one thing through another thing that has nothing in common with it and because (2) one can only understand effects through their causes, it follows that (3) causes and effects must have something in common.

Spinoza may, in producing this argument, have had Cartesian views about mind-body interaction as a target. On the intuitive objection, mind simply does not have what it takes—mass, impenetrability, and so on—to push body. Spinoza's argument differs: one could not understand a given corporeal action, raising one's hand perhaps, through something mental, such as an instance of will, and this shows that something mental could not cause the corporeal action. At 2p6 and more explicitly, at 3p2, Spinoza invokes 1a4 in this way. These propositions suggest that what is intelligible—"understandable through"—is the basis of Spinoza's account of causation.

Once we suppose that causes and effects must have something in common, a problem arises for understanding any causal interaction among substances. Substances of different attributes, minds and bodies perhaps, could not affect one another because they are not alike. Perhaps substances of the same attribute could: a body could affect a body, or a mind could affect a mind. Spinoza maintains, however, that there could not be two substances of the same attribute (1p5). He takes his definitions of

“substance,” “mode,” and “attribute” (1d3–1d5), together with 1a1, to show that distinct things differ either in their attributes or in their modes (1p4). Once we assume that two substances have the same attribute, Spinoza argues, we might only distinguish between them by means of difference in their modes, particular thoughts in minds, perhaps, or particular shapes in bodies. We cannot achieve this either, however, because, as Spinoza puts it at 1p1, a substance is prior in nature to its affections.

This is a powerful argument. Suppose that it is 11:30 and Eliot is thinking of lunch; later, at 1:00 and having eaten, she is thinking of Dorothea. It would be silly for someone to argue that these are two different minds in this case just because there are two different thoughts. Instead—and that is what it means to say that substances are prior in nature to their modes—this simply is two different instances of thought in a single substance, Eliot. Next, suppose that Borges is thinking of lunch, and Kadish is thinking of Helen. We might like to say that there are two different minds here. If, however, reasoning that there are different minds just because there are different thoughts would be silly in the first case, similar reasoning would be similarly silly in this case. Because substances are prior in nature to their modes, we must, in order to show that Borges and Kadish are distinct substances, point to some difference between them that is more basic than a difference in particular thoughts. The same problem arises for two purportedly different corporeal substances. If everything other than extension is accidental to them, it will be difficult to distinguish between them by any means that could not also be used, absurdly, to distinguish one purported substance from itself.

Note that in demonstrating 1p5, Spinoza seems to rely on a version of the *principle of the identity of indiscernibles*, on which, in order for there to be two different substances, one must be able to distinguish between them. Perhaps 1p4, which Spinoza relies upon in the demonstration, simply is that principle. Spinoza maintains on its basis that because we could not possibly *distinguish* two substances of the same attribute, there could not possibly *be* two substances of the same attribute. It is a strong principle, and one might resist Spinoza’s argument simply by rejecting it. If 1p4 is the principle, however, note that Spinoza offers a demonstration for it. It is not merely a question of whether the principle is intuitively plausible.

From these premises, a causal likeness principle (1p3) and the proposition on which there are no two substances that are alike (1p5),

Spinoza argues that a substance (1p7), and, in particular, God (1p11), exists. The most detailed and accessible of the different arguments to these existential conclusions is the second demonstration to 1p11. This demonstration incorporates a further strong principle, a version of the *principle of sufficient reason* (PSR) on which there must be a cause or reason that explains, for whatever exists, why it exists and, for whatever does not exist, why it does not exist. Spinoza argues that no other substance (1p6) and so no other thing (1p6c) could cause another substance, such as God, because causes and effects must be alike and there are no two substances that are alike. There is no cause or reason why substance or God should not exist, however. Therefore, by the PSR, substance and God must exist. Because whatever exists must have a cause, however, and once again by the PSR, substance must be its own cause.

Turning now to the second strand of argument in 1p1–1p15, Spinoza’s argument to substance monism draws upon the causal argument—1p14dem has 1p11 as a critical premise—but it also uses 1p5 in a different way, in order to show something about conception. Indeed, Spinoza does not appeal to causal principles or even mention causation at 1p14 or 1p15 in defending substance monism. Both of these propositions concern what can be or be conceived.

The demonstration to 1p14 emphasizes the definition of “God” as a substance with infinite (and all) attributes. Spinoza argues, given God’s existence (1p11), that if there were another substance, “it would have to be explained through some attribute of God.” That is, it would have one of God’s attributes. This is absurd, Spinoza claims, because in that case, in violation of 1p5, two substances of the same attribute would exist.

At 1p6, its corollary, 1p7, and 1p11, Spinoza uses 1p5 together with the PSR to develop claims about existence. The strand of argument emphasizing conception uses the same proposition to move in the other direction. From God’s existence, Spinoza concludes at 1p14dem that another substance cannot be or be conceived: “And so except God, no substance can be or, consequently, be conceived. For if it could be conceived, it would have to be conceived as existing. But this (by the first part of this demonstration) is absurd.” Modes, however, can only be in and be conceived through substance. Because God is the only substance, then, the argument of 1p15dem concludes, nothing can be or be conceived without God.

Gaps left in the formal presentation of *Ethics* 1 by the first two strands of argument show that there is a third strand of argument. The demonstrations to 1p11 omit any reference to 1p8–1p10 and the demonstrations to 1p14–1p15 do not refer to 1p12–1p13. These two series of propositions, however, do relate to one another. While 1p10 becomes the most prominent of these propositions later in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza’s claim that “each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself” figures in his accounts of attributes and modes at 2p5 and 2p6 (see §2.1 here), it is 1p8—“Every substance is necessarily infinite”—that most directly informs Spinoza’s principal claims about divisibility at 1p12–1p13. Spinoza’s use of the propositions in several lengthy scholia, which follow 1p8 itself and 1p15, suggests that their immediate role is to address an objection that Spinoza anticipates his account of God will provoke: by making God extended, Spinoza also makes God divisible. Beyond this function, however, the propositions also offer insight into Spinoza’s views about the relation between God and finite things.

This strand of argument, which emphasizes limitation, draws in the first instance upon 1d2:

1d2: That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature.

The demonstration to 1p8 proceeds by means of this definition together with yet a third application of 1p5. Spinoza uses the claim that there cannot be two substances of the same attribute as a basis for concluding that every substance is infinite: if a given substance were finite, then it would have to be limited by another substance of the same nature (1d2). Because there is no substance of the same attribute to limit a given substance (1p5), every substance is necessarily infinite.

One might imagine the divisibility of Spinozistic substance in at least two different ways: a substance of a single attribute (an extended substance perhaps) is divided to create two substances of that attribute (in this case, two extended things); or a substance of more than one attribute (such as substance that is thinking and extended) is divided to make two substances (in this case, one thinking substance and one extended substance). Spinoza addresses the first sort of purported divisibility, among others, at 1p12, arguing that it would be absurd because it would be a situation in which there would be two substances of the same attribute. He addresses the

second sort at 1p13, where he argues that such a division would require, absurdly, that a substance with infinite attributes could cease to exist.

Both demonstrations are complex. They may be incomplete if 1p13 considers only God, a substance with infinite attributes, and not substances of several but not infinite attributes. In any case, a corollary and scholium following 1p13 suggest that Spinoza takes there to be a more direct route to the demonstrations' conclusions in 1p8:

1p8c: From these [propositions] it follows that no substance, and consequently no corporeal substance, insofar as it is a substance, is divisible.

1p8cs: That substance is indivisible, is understood more simply merely from this, that the nature of substance cannot be conceived unless as infinite, and that by a part of substance nothing can be understood except a finite substance, which (by 1p8) implies a plain contradiction.

This corollary shows that Spinoza anticipates the objection that his substance monism, and in particular the suggestion that extension is one of God's attributes, implies that God is divisible and corruptible. He dedicates the scholium following 1p15 to the objection. The argument depends on a sharp distinction between substance and modes, which is clearest I think in Spinoza's discussion of water:

We conceive that water is divided and its parts separated from one another—insofar as it is water, but not insofar as it is corporeal substance. For insofar as it is substance, it is neither separated nor divided. Again, water, insofar as it is water, is generated and corrupted, but insofar as it is substance, it is neither generated nor corrupted. (1p15s2 G2/60)

When I pour half of a cup of water into another cup, I separate the two halves of water. Some area formerly characterized by water is now characterized by something else, air perhaps, and another area is now newly characterized by water. However, what characterizes substance (air, water, and so on) is not itself substance. Spinoza argues that we should not think that because we alter modes of substance in this way we also alter substance itself.

Substance—that is, God—is infinite, indivisible, eternal, and incorruptible. Modes, which are in God and conceived through God, are none of these things: Spinoza's response to the objection that anything extended is corruptible depends upon marking this sharp distinction between God and finite things. Although a successful response to the objection may depend on this distinction, the line that Spinoza draws in it

between God and finite things makes it difficult for him to explain the relation between the infinite and the finite, one of the principal tasks of the second half of *Ethics* 1.

1.2.1 What Does 1p5dem Establish?

An objection by Leibniz to the demonstration of 1p5 suggests that, in it, Spinoza somehow overlooks the possibility of substances of more than one attribute. Leibniz argues that one substance might have attributes c and d while another substance has attributes d and e. In this case, although the two substances have the same attribute, d, they nevertheless may be distinguished by a difference in their attributes because one has c while the other has e.

A first gesture at responding to Leibniz might emphasize the importance of Cartesians as interlocutors for Spinoza. On the Cartesian account of created substances, each created substance (that is, each thing that depends upon nothing other than God for its existence) has a principal attribute. A mind, for example, has thought as its principal attribute; a body has extension (*Principles* 1.53). The argument to 1p5 depends for its potency on such a conception, a feature of the view that I have tried to emphasize above in discussing particular minds (Eliot, Borges, Kadish) and particular thoughts. These points suggest that the demonstration 1p5 is effective as an *ad hominem* argument against a Cartesian.

Should readers conclude that the argument is ineffective otherwise? The answer to this question is not clear. Because of the importance of 1p5 to each of the three strands of argument in *Ethics* 1p1–1p15, it is also pressing. Evidence that the assumption that any substance will have one attribute is not warranted on Spinoza's own terms may be found in the definitions of "substance" and "attribute," which do nothing to restrict substance to a single attribute. Further evidence may be found in his final conception of substance: Spinoza himself thinks that the substance that does exist has more than one attribute. Indeed, it has infinite attributes.

Evidence, on the other side, that the assumption is not an error includes the demonstration to 1p8, which begins, "a substance of one attribute does not exist unless it is unique (1p5) . . ." This suggests that Spinoza himself understands 1p5 to be a claim about substances of one attribute. An interpretation, such as that of Martial Gueroult, that places emphasis on this

evidence might include the claims that the demonstration to 1p5 is not purely *ad hominem* and that it is not really invalid. Instead, Spinoza omits at 1p5 the claim that it concerns only substances of one attribute, but it is nevertheless clear that this is the view that the proposition concerns, as he acknowledges explicitly shortly afterward.

The two approaches yield two different interpretations of 1p5 and so a choice that, because of 1p5's central place in all three strands of argument, has repercussions for the interpretation of the rest of Spinoza's metaphysics of substance. On the first, Spinoza takes himself to have shown—even though his demonstration is wanting—that there could never be two substances (of any kind) that share an attribute. A critic who accepts this view may then understand arguments for central propositions to incorporate this strong, though ill-founded, premise. On the second, Spinoza takes himself to have shown—perhaps one may even say that he has shown—that there cannot be two one-attribute substances of the same attribute. This is a more modest result, so a critic who accepts this reading will take 1p5 to be relatively weak and will assess subsequent demonstrations that use it with this modest interpretation in hand.

1.2.2 Does Spinoza Offer an Ontological Argument?

Familiar versions of the ontological argument for the existence of God, including versions that Descartes offers (see Meditation 5, AT 7 63; the First Set of Replies, AT 7 112–120; and *Principles* 1.14), make God's existence follow from the definition of “God,” from God's nature, or from God's essence. The causal strand of argument that leads to 1p7 and 1p11 resembles traditional ontological arguments in a way. Spinoza does claim that substance exists from its own nature (1p7) and that God's essence involves existence (1p11, dem. 1). However, these arguments, and particularly the demonstration of 1p7, complicate the question of whether Spinoza offers a traditional ontological argument and raise a puzzle about Spinoza's understanding of definition, nature, and essence.

Here is some reason to think that Spinoza maintains a traditional version of the ontological argument. As we have seen above (§1.1.1), he apparently maintains that the definition of a thing captures—in the words of 1p8s, “involves” and “expresses”—the thing's nature. So understood, the definition of “substance” at 1d3 captures the nature of substance, and the

definition of “God” at 1d6 captures the nature of God. At 1d1, and again in discussing substance in the demonstration to 1p7, Spinoza makes “essence” and “nature” equivalent. Of substance he writes, “(by 1d1) its essence necessarily involves existence, or it pertains to its nature to exist.” If, first, the definition of “substance” captures its nature and, second, it pertains to the nature of substance to exist, however, we should be able to conclude from the definition of “substance” that substance exists. Similarly, emphasizing this time 1d6, we should be able to conclude that God exists from the definition of “God.”

The demonstration of the existence of substance at 1p7, however, does not, as one might expect given all of these points, invoke only the definition of “substance.” It suggests that Spinoza depends upon several further premises in the argument to the existence of substance. In the demonstration, Spinoza invokes 1p6c. That corollary, however, invokes 1p6 and, tracing the sources of that proposition, every proposition that precedes it. The argument also, it seems, depends upon the PSR. In the demonstration, Spinoza argues that because nothing else (neither another substance nor a mode) can produce a substance, a substance must produce itself.

As Don Garrett has noted, the demonstration to 1p7 seems to have a form very similar to that of the second demonstration to 1p11, where Spinoza’s use of the PSR is explicit. So understood, his view is that, if substance did not exist, there would have to be some reason explaining that non-existence; but there is no such reason, so substance must exist; substance, however, cannot be caused by something else (by 1p6c); therefore, because it must be caused by something, it must be self-caused or, what is the same thing, it pertains to its nature to exist. If this is Spinoza’s view, then the definition of “substance” does *not* capture its nature after all. We only know that it is the nature of substance to exist after we add substantial further doctrines to the definition.

Central issues for the interpretation of Spinoza’s metaphysics arise in the interpretation of these arguments. God, of course, is the centerpiece of *Ethics* 1, and understanding God’s nature as what is conceived through itself and self-caused is a major task for a reader. Readers’ interpretations of Spinoza’s accounts of existence, essence, and causation in the argument to 1p11 also may have implications for the interpretation of further uses of these concepts in his accounts of finite things and of God’s relation to finite

things. The question of Spinoza's relation to Descartes may also turn on the interpretation of 1p7 and 1p11. On the face of it, Spinoza's claim at 1p5 seems to be a critical point in his movement from generally Cartesian assumptions to a very un-Cartesian substance monism: Descartes maintains that there are many created substances of the same attribute, including many minds and many bodies, but at 1p5 Spinoza denies that there could be two substances of the same attribute. I have emphasized these points in my presentation of the argument. There are, however, reasons to resist this reading. Strictly, Descartes maintains that only God is a substance at *Principles of Philosophy* 1.51. Perhaps, then, the deeper, first difference between Spinoza and Descartes may be found at 1p7 and 1p11. The demonstrations suggest that Spinoza does not, where Descartes does, take God's existence simply to follow from God's definition. He relies for that claim instead on further strong principles.

1.2.3 How Prominent in the *Ethics* Is the PSR?

The clearest instance of the PSR in the *Ethics* occurs at 1p11dem2: "For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence." Whether one can find an equivalent principle in the opening elements of the *Ethics*, and so the degree of the PSR's prominence there, is an open, difficult question. The axioms of *Ethics* 1, any of which might seem relevant, are particularly interesting candidates:

1a1: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another.

1a2: What cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself.

1a3: From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow.

1a4: The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.

1a5 Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, *or* the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.

If to conceive a thing is just to explain it for Spinoza—and Michael Della Rocca offers several texts (1a5, 1p10s, 1p14dem, and 2p5) in support of the claim that it is—then 1a2, which amounts to the claim that everything must be conceived, also means that everything must be explained. This suggestion raises two concerns. First, if 1a2 depends upon some further

view in order to be understood to be the PSR, then perhaps it would be better to assert that 1a2 *and* that further claim (1a5, perhaps) together are equivalent to the doctrine. Second, if 1a2 just is the PSR, its lack of prominence in the *Ethics*—Spinoza never cites the axiom—does little to support any claims about the importance of the PSR to Spinoza.

Don Garrett suggests that Spinoza may state the PSR at 1a3. If any existence or non-existence for Spinoza is an effect, Garrett reasons, then the second half of this axiom is equivalent to the proposition that any existence or non-existence has a cause. The equivalence of causes and reasons is clear at the 1p11dem2 version of the PSR itself, so 1a3, again on this assumption, would also include the claim that there is a reason for any existence or non-existence. This claim, like Della Rocca's claim about 1a2, raises a concern about the purported prominence of the PSR in the *Ethics*: Spinoza only uses 1a3 twice in demonstrations. There is also little basis for the assumption, although it may well be a result of further argument in the *Ethics*, that any existence or non-existence is an effect.

Recognizing these problems, Garrett revises his view in later work, suggesting that the conjunction of 1a3 with 1a2 and 1a4 is a basis for the principle. Thus, everything must be conceived (1a2); to conceive a thing is to grasp a cause (1a4); and causes always necessitate (1a3). A challenge for this reading is the interpretation of 1a4, which requires understanding what Spinoza means there by “involves” and “depends.” One might also wonder whether 1a3 is now superfluous to the question. The canonical formulation at 1p11dem2 invokes causes, so it is not clear that causes need further explanation here. It may be enough to know, on the basis of 1a2 and 1a4 (so understood), that everything has a cause.

Martin Lin suggests that the PSR is evident in several different ways in these axioms. First, on his view, 1a1 states the PSR. Inherence, Lin contends, entails causation for Spinoza. From this one can conclude that, because everything inheres in something, everything has a cause. Lin suggests that 1a4 and 1a5 play important roles in showing the relevance of 1a1 to the PSR. This suggestion cannot be a complete account, however, since neither 1a4 nor 1a5 explicitly concerns inherence, or being in, the relation central to 1a1.

Second, Lin suggests that 1a2 is a statement of “metaphysical rationalism,” a label he takes to capture Spinoza's commitment to the PSR.

Lin does not take any other axiom to supplement 1a2, so it seems that his view of that axiom is like Della Rocca's and faces the same challenges.

Finally, Lin takes 1a3, together with 1a4 and 1a5, to suggest that everything has a sufficient reason. This view, I worry, may run into the same problem that Garrett's first view faces. Supposing that Lin is correct to think that, together with 1a4 and 1a5, 1a3 shows that causes are sufficient reason for or fully explain their effects, none of the axioms suggest that every existent is an effect.

Although each of these proposals deserves detailed scrutiny, two conclusions hold particular importance. First, 1a2 is the only clearly perfectly general axiom, applying, as the PSR itself does, to all things. The scope of 1a1 may be similarly universal. To my mind, however, that axiom concerns only existents, whereas Spinoza's version of the PSR at 1p11dem2 also concerns non-existents and even impossible things, such as square circles. Proposals that at least include 1a2 therefore have the most *prima facie* plausibility. Second, if a claim about the PSR's prominence in Spinoza's thought is to be founded in its frequent occurrence in Spinoza's formal apparatus, a proposal that includes 1a4 will be stronger than others. That axiom associates causation and explanation in a promising way, and it occurs frequently and significantly in Spinoza's metaphysical arguments.

Turning explicitly then to the prominence of the PSR in the *Ethics*, critics tend to acknowledge a disconnect of sorts between the axioms of *Ethics* 1 and Spinoza's use of the PSR. Indeed, this point can hardly be resisted. As we have seen, the axiom that most closely approaches the PSR, 1a2, never appears in a demonstration in the *Ethics*. Where, moreover, Spinoza does explicitly state the principle, at 1p11dem2 and in an incomplete version at 1p8s2 (G2/28–29), he cites no axiom in support of the principle. Those who discount the importance of the PSR to Spinoza emphasize these points: how could a principle fundamental to Spinoza's system have so few explicit appearances in the *Ethics*?

1.2.4 What Is the Relation between Causation and Limitation in the *Ethics*?

Where Spinoza explicitly raises the PSR at 1p11dem2, he demands reasons or causes for non-existence as well as existence. The demand for a reason or cause of non-existence, which I will call the “negative clause” of the

principle, may seem inconsequential or at least unimportant relative to the demand for a reason for every existent. Spinoza's use of the PSR at 1p11, however, derives the existence of things, notably God, in the first instance by an appeal to the negative clause. In the first demonstration, he asks the reader to assume and then try to make sense of God's non-existence. In the second, he writes, "if there is no reason or cause which prevents God from existing . . . it must certainly be inferred that he necessarily exists."

These applications of the PSR suggest that, perhaps contrary to our expectations, the negative clause of the principle substantially informs Spinoza's understanding of causation. When a given thing does not exist, there is a cause of its non-existence. For a thing to begin to exist, such an account suggests, what is necessary is for that cause, the cause of its non-existence, to be removed. Where he writes about finite bodies at 1p11dem.2, Spinoza suggests that the reason for their existence or non-existence comes from "the order of the whole of corporeal nature." That is, for a given non-existent body that will exist, there is another body outside of it that prevents it from existing and so causes (and explains) its non-existence. There can be nothing similar in nature to God other than God, Spinoza argues, and that shows why there can be no cause of God's non-existence.

These applications of the negative clause suggest that in the first instance, Spinoza, like Maimonides, takes the removal of a limitation (a cause or reason of the same attribute) to be the cause of a given finite thing. In the definitions, Spinoza writes:

1d2: That thing is said to be finite in its own kind that can be limited by another of the same nature. For example, a body is called finite because we always conceive another that is greater. Thus a thought is limited by another thought. But a body is not limited by a thought nor a thought by a body.

Although Spinoza defines "cause of itself" in *Ethics* 1, he does not define "cause of something else." The use of the negative clause in the PSR suggests, however, that limitation in the definition of a thing that is finite in its own kind prepares the way for an account of causation in finite things. On this view, a finite thing, A, does not exist only if it is limited by another thing, B, of its own nature. B causes A not to exist and explains that non-existence, and the removal of B causes and explains A's existence.

Limitation and causation, so understood and as the Latin terms *terminare* and *determinare* suggest, correlate closely.

Causation among finite things is a central part of metaphysics, so this view holds great interest. How precisely to understand the view remains an open question, however. We might say, again for two things of the same attribute, that A limits B if and only if A causes and explains –B. Alternatively we might say that if A limits B, then –A causes and explains B. These both seem close to correct to me. They leave room, however, for more work. Even where the removal of something, the dam in the river perhaps, causes something else, such as the flood, we tend to think that this is only a case of partial causation. An account of something else, such as the causal natures of things themselves or of causal laws, is needed in order to generate a complete interpretation of Spinoza's views about causation and finite things.

1.3 The One and the Many: 1p16–1p36

Monism, a philosophical doctrine on which there is really only one thing, can be attractive insofar as it promises elegant, unifying explanation. For example, Spinoza's substance monism suggests that if one understands the one substance, God, one then, in some sense, understands everything. The challenge of fulfilling this promise may be put in the form of an objection that is frequently called the problem of the one and the many: how can so many apparently very different things—the whole variety of what we experience in our lives—*really* be just one? Or, put in terms of the understanding that substance monism promises, how can understanding this one thing, God, contribute to my understanding of so many different things?

The problem may be put as a dilemma formed by the needs for both consistency and informativeness. The demand for consistency shapes many versions of the problem, including notably Pierre Bayle's influential early criticism of Spinoza. To insist that God is everything, Bayle writes, is to insist that, when one person affirms something and another person denies it, God affirms and denies that thing; or again, when one person loves a given object and another person hates that object, that God loves and hates that object. It is, Bayle writes in his *Dictionary*, as incoherent a notion of God as a square circle is a notion of shape.

One might respond to such objections by resorting to indexicals and other qualifications: God affirms P insofar as God is Harris and denies P insofar as God is Pence; God loves aubergine insofar as God is Mike and hates it insofar as God is Allison. In that case, however, the demand for informativeness arises: if all of the variety of the world can be explained by these sorts of qualifications, what does this monism really tell us? For Spinoza's monism to be a substantial and interesting view, it must govern or characterize all of being in some way. Despite Bayle's emphasis on consistency, it is perhaps the demand for informativeness that presses Spinoza most sharply. In what way does all of the variety of the world belong to God? How do things arise in or through God? In what respects does the view that everything is God inform our understanding of any finite thing? A mark of Spinoza's appreciation of the difficulty of these questions and of the value of their answers is the third of his kinds of knowledge, knowledge that proceeds from an adequate idea of God to an adequate idea of the essence of a thing (2p40s2, see §2.4 below). To understand precisely how God informs the correct understanding of what a finite thing is, on his view, is to have the best knowledge of that thing.

The second half of *Ethics* 1 addresses the demand for informativeness. Directly after the assertion of substance monism at 1p14–1p15, Spinoza describes what he takes to be the implications of this view for other things in the world: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under infinite intellect)” (1p16). This proposition is a principle of plenitude, that is, a principle on which everything that can exist does exist. A principle of plenitude might invoke God's goodness and the thesis that existence is good: God will create everything possible because every existent, no matter how flawed, is good. Although Spinoza does not take God to be benevolent, he nevertheless in some passages refers to 1p16 in a way that makes it seem as though he takes it to be a more precise restatement of such a view:

But to those who ask “why God did not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?” I answer only “because he did not lack material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest”; or, to speak more properly, “because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect” (as I have demonstrated in 1p16). (1 Appendix, G2/83)

Plenitude, couched in these terms, suggests that Spinoza's conception of God as the one substance is informative because it promises an unlimited (infinite!) richness of existence.

The view that everything that is possible is actual, however, can also be restated in terms that emphasize not the richness of existence but the poverty of the possible: only what is actual is possible. The argument from 1p16–1p36, I think, emphasizes this implication of 1p16, and this is another respect in which Spinoza's monism is informative: the fact that God is the only substance constrains what exists and how it exists because it constrains what is possible. So understood, the ways in which God constrains the possible—through causal determinism and necessitarianism—become a focus of these propositions.

The first several elements offer an account of the ways in which God is a cause of all things (1p16c1–1p18). In them Spinoza situates his conception of God's causation among familiar philosophical alternatives. Next, Spinoza begins the argument to determinism and necessitarianism by means of an account of the dependence of eternal and infinite things on God (1p19–1p23). Drawing upon these propositions, Spinoza proceeds to a detailed account of God's determination and necessitation of finite things (1p24–1p33). Very roughly, these groups of propositions may be understood in terms of a common characterization of determinism: changeless facts (the eternal and infinite) govern the determination of one thing by others (the finite). The final propositions of *Ethics* 1 (1p34–1p36) refer back to 1p16 and emphasize power. In the course of arguing to determinism, Spinoza suggests that for a thing to be in God is just for it to be a determinate expression of one of God's attributes. That complex phrase means, Spinoza argues at 1p36, that all finite things share God's nature to some degree. That nature is to be powerful or, in other words, to be a cause of existence. This, then, is another way of understanding how the many share the nature of the one. In necessitating them, God constrains and informs the nature and activity of finite things; in being finite determinations of God, finite things manifest God's nature as power that produces existence. Here I introduce these four groups of propositions before turning to some pressing questions.

In the first group of elements, propositions 1p16c1–1p18, Spinoza maintains that God is the efficient cause of all things (*efficientem*, 1p16c1); a cause through itself and not an accidental cause (*per se* and not *per*

accidens, 1p16c2); the first cause (*primam*, 1p16c3); the only free cause (*liberam*, 1p17c2); and an immanent rather than a transitive cause of all things (*immanens* and not *transiens*, 1p18). In these claims Spinoza seeks to clarify his position by distinguishing his account of God's activity from traditional accounts. Two features of the text make this clear. First, although they build upon one another, these corollaries and propositions do not appear substantially later in the formal demonstrations of the *Ethics*. This suggests that they have a purpose outside of the main line of argument. Second, the negative claims show that Spinoza is interested in contrasting his view to the views of others. Those who take God to be an accidental or a transitive cause are mistaken, he argues. Similarly, in an extended scholium following 1p17c2, Spinoza argues that, although many of his predecessors have understood God to be a free cause, they have misunderstood what it is to be a free cause.

Roughly, the labels that Spinoza endorses suggest that, on his view, God is sufficient for and explains all things (efficient cause); God causes things in virtue of God's nature (*per se* cause); God's causal activity is not itself caused by anything else (first cause); God's causal activity is not constrained by anything else (free cause); and God acts on what is in, rather than outside, God (immanent cause). A great deal may be said about each of these characterizations of God's activity. For the purpose of understanding the argument of *Ethics* 1, however, Spinoza's understanding of immanent causation is perhaps the most important topic.

Spinoza cites the claim that God is the efficient cause of all things (1p16c1) in the argument to the conclusion that God is the immanent cause of all things (1p18dem). He therefore suggests that God is the efficient cause of A if and only if A is in God; that is, God's efficient causation is immanent and not transitive. Accounts of causation between finite things later in the *Ethics* suggest, however, that efficient causation can be transitive in the interactions of finite things. It is natural, then—although still open to debate, particularly since Spinoza does not use “transitive cause” (*causa transiens*) in the *Ethics* again—to take this association of immanent cause and efficient cause only to apply to God's causal activity.

The next series of passages, 1p19–1p23, concern eternal and infinite things: God and God's attributes (1p19, 1p20c2); infinite modes that follow from the “absolute nature” of attributes (1p21, 1p23); and infinite modes that follow from other infinite modes (1p22, 1p23). The demonstrations to

these passages build upon one another, and they have premises in Spinoza's definitions and existential propositions (1p7 and 1p11). With 1p16, he cites 1p21–1p22 prominently in his arguments to determinism and necessity that begin at 1p28. That is, he establishes these propositions about the infinite and the eternal; sets them to one side in order to build an account of the finite from 1p24–1p27; and then applies both kinds of propositions in defending determinism. This is evidence that Spinoza conceives of determinism in nature in terms of the causal activities of finite things, somehow governed or regulated by eternal and universal facts.

This reasoning suggests that God, God's attributes, immediate infinite modes, and mediate infinite modes are four varieties of eternal or universal facts or regularities. My language here is vague because the propositions are extraordinarily difficult to interpret. An influential interpretation of them by Edwin Curley is more specific: the attribute of extension is a fact that the most basic laws of nature describe, and the infinite modes that depend, immediately or mediately, upon the attribute are derivative facts that are described by more specific laws. This interpretation is attractive because it is clear and because it invites an understanding of Spinoza's determinism in familiar terms: particular events follow from a given state of affairs in accordance with universal laws of nature. Spinoza does not invoke laws of nature often, but he does do so just prior to these propositions, at 1p17, some evidence for Curley's view. I raise some concerns about the view below (§1.3.1), but it is certainly useful at least as a provisional understanding of Spinoza's infinite modes.

The demonstration to 1p21 suggests that Spinoza's account of infinite modes addresses a puzzle. Considering reasoning rather than causation, it seems just evident that, just as an eternal truth is true at all times and places, so something implied by an eternal truth is also true at all times and places. Spinoza, however, takes "reason" and "cause" to be the same thing. We know that God is the cause of all things (by, e.g., 1p18) and that God is eternal and immutable. How then could God's absolute and infinite nature cause something with a "determinate existence" (that is, that does not exist at all times and places)?

Spinoza's response at 1p20c2 is that whatever constitutes God's nature (that is, the attributes) is eternal. At 1p21 he argues, as one might expect given the close association of reason and cause, that whatever follows from one of the attributes is also eternal and infinite. Critics refer to these entities

frequently as “immediate infinite modes.” Then, at 1p22, he acknowledges further that anything that follows from an immediate infinite mode will likewise be infinite. In other words, although it will have to depend upon God in some sense, a determinate, or finite, existent will not follow from God’s absolute nature. Considering Curley’s view again, one might similarly maintain that while all events in the world must conform to a law of nature, one cannot know from a law of nature alone that a particular event will occur. God, Spinoza assures us, causes these finite, particular things as well (1p16, 1p16c1, 1p18, 1p25). The argument from 1p21–22 suggests, however, that these do not follow from God’s absolute nature. Their explanation will not be as direct as the explanation of infinite things.

In the next series of propositions, 1p24–1p33, Spinoza makes a start at explaining God’s causation of finite things. He argues for determinism and necessitarianism. These may be understood generically as doctrines that are independent of one another such that one might endorse either without endorsing the other.

Determinism: all states of the world are effects that follow from other states of the world in accordance with laws of nature.

Necessitarianism: all states of the world could not have been otherwise.

In order to understand how one could endorse determinism without endorsing necessitarianism, one might imagine two different possible completely deterministic worlds. In the actual world, which is one of these possible worlds, it is the case that the blinds fall because Goldstein’s Shimmy lets them, because he’s concerned about the protests, and so on, in accordance with laws of nature. In another possible world, it might be the case now that blinds remain up because the office occupant was sick, because of dinner last night, and so on. Thus, in the actual world, the blinds are down, and it is determined to be so, but there could have been a different determined order of events and so different events.

In order to understand how one could be a necessitarian without being a determinist, one might consider whether it might turn out that, as in a novel, states of the world do not really determine other states of the world. Even if it seems that the blinds fall because Shimmy releases them, there is really no causal connection between those events. Rather, each is an element of Goldstein’s story. If one thinks, in addition, that there could be no other

possible events, that is reason to conclude that the events are necessitated without being determined.

While determinism and necessitarianism are distinct views, in Spinoza's argument the clearest expression of necessitarianism, 1p33, does derive from the clearest expression of determinism, 1p28. A principal task for understanding these propositions, then, is to understand how the one doctrine leads to the other and, in particular, how Spinoza rules out a conception of being on which there are at least two possible but fully determined sequences of events.

The argument begins with a claim that the essence of what is produced by God does not involve existence (1p24). This proposition bridges a gap between infinite and finite modes. Neither infinite nor finite modes have essences that involve existence: God determines the existence and essence of both alike (1p25). Terminology that Spinoza introduces at 1p29s and uses at 1p31 similarly bridges this gap. Whatever does have an essence that involves existence—substance and attributes, perhaps, or God considered as a cause that acts solely from its own nature—is active nature, *natura naturans*; whatever has an essence that does not involve existence and so depends upon God or God's attributes—again, infinite modes and finite modes alike—is produced nature, *natura naturata*.

Spinoza's expresses determinism most clearly at 1p28 and necessitarianism at 1p33:

1p28: Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.

1p33: Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.

The demonstration to 1p28 emphasizes the propositions preceding it that characterize God's causal activity (1p24–1p26): both what is infinite and what is finite are caused by God; finite things could not follow from anything eternal and infinite alone, however; therefore, they must follow from other finite things.

At this point in the argument, because everything depends upon God, a common way to maintain determinism without necessity would be to

emphasize God's freedom to choose among different possible infinite things or different possible finite things. Some evidence that Spinoza is alert to such a view is his pointed criticism of views that give God freedom in this sense (1p17s, 1p33s). Spinoza maintains an account of God's freedom that differs sharply from this one. Most clearly at 1p11dem2, he argues that God's own nature fully determines God. Similarly, he writes in the present context, "all things . . . have been determined by the necessity of God's nature to exist and act in a certain way" (1p33dem). Because God is necessary, everything that God determines or, in other words, that follows from God, is also necessary. *Natura naturans* is free, but it is free in the sense that God acts without compulsion from anything else and from "the laws of his nature alone" (1p17), not in the sense that God chooses what to do among different options (1p32c1).

The argument from 1p16–1p33 completes Spinoza's characterization of the one substance by explaining the sense in which the many are one: the necessity of God's nature fully necessitates all things by fully determining all things. The final propositions of *Ethics* 1 (1p34–1p36) recast this relation in terms of power. Causation and reason, which as we have seen are prominent throughout *Ethics* 1, are double-edged: there is a cause or reason explaining the existence of whatever exists *and* there is a cause or reason explaining the non-existence of whatever does not exist. Power, by contrast, is for Spinoza directed exclusively at existence: "to be able not to exist is to lack power . . . to be able to exist is to have power" (1p11dem3). We can consider particular existents as effects, but that terminology does not for Spinoza characterize existents exclusively: necessary non-existents such as square circles and contingent non-existents such as my great-great-grandfather are also effects. At 1p36, Spinoza argues that whatever exists has an effect. In the demonstration, however, he says something more specific: "whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God" (1p36dem). Whatever exists, as an expression of the nature of God, is, like God, the cause of existence.

This terminology, the terminology of power and the related notion of the causation of existence, becomes increasingly prominent in Spinoza's discussions of singular things—notably, 3p6dem (see §3.2 below)—later in the *Ethics*, and Spinoza introduces the term "power" (*potentia*) formally at 4d8, where he makes it equivalent to virtue in his discussion of the human good. On Spinoza's account, the one substance, God, is essentially a power

to exist and the many things in the world are all particular expressions of that power.

1.3.1 Do Laws of Nature Describe the Attribute of Extension?

Edwin Curley's influential interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics identifies the attribute of extension with the basic nomological facts and then takes the laws of nature to describe those facts. This interpretation is substantive and appealing because it shows how Spinoza's monism is informative in terms that are familiar and clear. As Curley notes, his interpretation is also consistent with some of what Spinoza writes about laws of nature in the *Ethics* as well as the TTP.

There are, despite these virtues, reasons to have reservations about this interpretation. Here I focus, not on the question of what Spinoza takes God and God's activity to be like, but on the question of what he takes the laws of nature to be like. A principal problem concerns Curley's emphasis on extension in his account of the laws of nature. There is no evidence in *Ethics* 1 for the restriction, and there is strong evidence later in the *Ethics* against this view. To emphasize extension may therefore misrepresent Spinoza's view and omit what is most important about it: the most basic laws of nature apply to all things, including extended and non-extended things, alike.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza mentions laws of nature prominently in two passages:

1p17: God acts from the laws of his nature [*suae naturae legibus*] alone, and is compelled by no one.

Dem.: We have just shown (1p16) that from the necessity of the divine nature alone, or (what is the same thing) from the laws of his nature alone, absolutely infinite things follow.

Nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, that is, the laws and rules of Nature [*leges et regulas naturae*], according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, through the universal laws and rules of Nature . . . Therefore, I shall treat the nature and powers of the affects, and the power of the mind over them, by the same method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies. (3 Preface)

The demonstration to 1p17 includes the phrase "absolutely infinite" to describe what follows from the laws of God's nature. That predicate,

however, is also what characterizes God at 1d6. In the explication following 1d6, Spinoza contrasts what is absolutely infinite and what is infinite in its own kind: “if something is only infinite in its own kind we can deny infinite attributes of it.” A single attribute, the explication implies, is infinite in its own kind and not absolutely infinite. Curley’s view, understood as an interpretation of Spinoza’s “laws of God’s nature,” would suggest that what follows from them concerns only the attribute of extension. In what sense could such a description be of a thing that is absolutely infinite?

The problem is more explicit in the Preface to *Ethics* 3. There, Spinoza insists that the laws of nature are always and everywhere the same, applying to anything of any nature of whatever kind. How could a law describing the attribute of extension apply to anything of whatever kind? Spinoza’s claim seems to suggest that laws of nature as he conceives them do really belong to God’s nature in the sense that they characterize all of God’s activity under all attributes. An infinite mode, however, is a mode of one attribute.

Consider also the end of the *Ethics* 3 passage. There, on the basis of his understanding of laws of nature, Spinoza intends to treat the human affects and the power of the mind over them just as he has treated mind and God, that is, just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies. From an understanding of law, he knows how to treat anything: substance or mode, mind or body. Such a conception of law suggests that Curley’s interpretation misses a fundamental commitment in Spinoza: the laws of extension and the laws of thought, on this view, are the same laws, which are in God’s nature and so characterize God as well as each attribute and each mode of each attribute.

1.3.2 What Is the Causation of Essence?

Certainly, 1p19–1p23 concern the eternal and infinite; 1p24–1p27 concern all things that are determined by God; and 1p28dem draws on both sets of propositions in the defense of determinism. How, on Spinoza’s view, these sets of propositions relate to one another is less clear. Nor is it clear how he takes determinate particular things to relate to eternal and infinite things. It seems likely that these questions turn on the difference between the causation of essence and the causation of existence.

Spinoza argues in the demonstration to 1p28 that a finite and determinate thing could not be produced by the “absolute nature of an attribute of God”

or anything that follows from it, implying that it could not be produced by an attribute or any of the infinite modes that follow from an attribute. The reason that Spinoza offers for this conclusion is that effects of such things are eternal and infinite. The finite and determinate, in this argument, oppose the eternal and infinite.

At 1p17s2, Spinoza draws a similar distinction between the essence and existence of a man: “[A] man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence, for the latter is an eternal truth. Hence, they can agree entirely according to their essence. But in existing they must differ.” On this passage, human essence is an eternal truth, but human existence is determinate. The distinction suggests that human essence, as eternal, may follow other eternal things, such as attributes and infinite modes. Human existence, however, because it is finite and determinate, may not.

This reading is further reinforced by a strategy that I have offered for the interpretation of Spinoza’s definitions (§1.1.1). In order to take the definition of “mode” to be a real definition, it must be in some sense an account of how a mode is caused. This would be problematic for Spinoza if the only sense in which a mode is caused were the sense in which it is caused by something outside of it. Such a definition could not also capture the nature of the mode. Spinoza, however, at KV§1 and in passages such as 1p17s2 suggests that modes have two causes, a cause of their essence and a cause of their existence. Once again, the discussion pushes us to take a particular mode to have an efficient cause of its existence in another particular mode but another efficient cause, in this case an efficient cause of its essence, in something eternal.

Spinoza writes at 1p25: “God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.” The proposition serves as a premise to 1p26, which in turn serves as central premise in the argument to determinism at 1p28. Both demonstrations are difficult, but both turn on the distinction between what is finite and determinate and what is eternal and infinite. The two different senses of causation suggest a way of understanding how infinite and finite features of the world interact in determinism for Spinoza. If we take the essence of a finite thing to be determined by an attribute and to be an eternal truth, then we may take it to be the end of the finite sequence of infinite causes, which runs from God, to attributes, to immediate infinite modes, and so on, issuing in that essence. Likewise, if we take the existence of the finite thing to be determined by

another finite thing, then it will be an element in the infinite chain of finite causes. Such a view is vague and leaves many questions unanswered. It is also promising, however. Our understanding of many central features of Spinoza's view, including his conceptions of time, of species and individual essences, and of the eternal existence of part of the human mind may be informed by better understanding of these two orders.

1.3.3 Is Power More Characteristic of Spinoza's Monism Than Reason?

Although the answer to this question may depend upon what one understands by "characteristic," the final propositions of *Ethics* 1 form the basis for an interesting case for the answer that power better vindicates Spinoza's monism. God's existence, like the existence of anything, has a cause or reason, by 1p11dem. That cause or reason is God's own nature. Because everything else is in God, God's cause or reason, ultimately, is the cause or reason of everything else also. So presented, Spinoza's substance monism might appear to be, above all, a thesis about explanation: God explains everything. This is not quite the right story, however. Understanding why it is not can also show why it might be better to argue that Spinoza's substance monism is a thesis about power.

Consider again the most explicit formulation of the PSR in the *Ethics*: "For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence." Spinoza invokes the PSR explicitly in the demonstration; it may be present in or closely related to several axioms; and it probably plays a critical though tacit role at 1p7. It is, then, undeniably important to the argument of *Ethics* 1. This version of the PSR, however, suggests that explanation itself is diverse in a way that makes it sit awkwardly with Spinoza's substance monism.

Spinoza emphasizes this diversity at 1p11dem1. Although the different ways in which God causes existents need explanation, God is ultimately the explanation of all existence. There are, however, other causes and reasons, which explain non-existence. Some of these do not have their own nature as a reason for their non-existence. Perhaps we could argue that God is that reason, if the existence of something else is what prevents a given thing from existing and so explains its non-existence. Or perhaps a non-existent does part of the work in explaining its own non-existence. Horses

occupying a likely ecological niche do some of the work to explain why unicorns do not exist. Perhaps the very nature of a unicorn—on which it is horselike but suffers various competitive disadvantages—also contributes. In any case, Spinoza thinks that there are also things the natures of which wholly explain their own non-existence: a square circle, for example. The non-existence of these things involves a contradiction. It is difficult to see what work Spinoza's God might contribute to this reason. This appears to be a case of genuine diversity.

The negative clause in Spinoza's version of the PSR that is the source of this diversity is not a sort of afterthought either. As we have seen, it matters fundamentally to the arguments of 1p7 and 1p11dem1, where Spinoza begins by asking readers to try to explain how it would be that God does not exist. It also matters to 1p11dem2, where Spinoza argues that "a thing necessarily exists if there is no reason or cause which prevents it from existing." He concludes on the basis of this invocation of the negative clause that God necessarily exists.

Power, on the other hand, concerns only existence. It, therefore, tracks God and God's activity perfectly. To say that there is one thing, for Spinoza, is not to say that there is one reason, but it is to say that there is one power. If something like this account is correct, then the PSR does play an important role in getting Spinoza's metaphysics off the ground: it is fundamental insofar as without it, we do not know that God exists. It is not, however, the single principle that God and God's activity embodies. God is only, after all, what exists. While Spinoza accurately characterizes his own commitment at 1p36 in arguing that nothing exists that does not have some effect, then, he does not in that view fully characterize causation or explanation. There are non-existent things that also have causes or reasons. The demonstration to 1p36 is more specific: "whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God." Power is central to Spinoza's monism, then, insofar as power, more specifically than reason, characterizes God. Spinoza's monism is informative, and so addresses the problem of the one the many, most clearly in this doctrine. All existents are like God in that all express power.

1.4 Teleology and the Origin of Common Prejudice: *Ethics* 1

Appendix

The Appendix to *Ethics* 1 is written in ordinary prose rather than the geometric form. In it, Spinoza compares what he takes himself to have shown about God to common prejudices about God and further prejudices that arise from them. Spinoza himself offers an admirably clear account of the structure of his presentation (G2/78.6–12), which I will follow here. First, he explains why people are inclined to believe what he takes to be a fundamental prejudice about God, on which God pursues ends in acting. Then he argues that this view is false. Finally, he argues that the view gives rise to further prejudices about good, evil, merit, sin, and other normative concepts.

Here is Spinoza's account, which echoes Maimonides's, of the fundamental prejudice that gives rise to so many further problematic beliefs:

All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God. (G2/78.1–6)

Two parts of this view deserve close attention: the common conviction that God acts on an account of ends and the common belief about what those ends are. I will consider them in turn.

Spinoza's "indeed" (*imo*) does not, on my view, suggest clearly that people commonly perform some kind of inference on which, because all natural things act this way God does also. The language is not that specific, and such a view would be surprising insofar as it would suggest that people commonly take God to be a natural thing. Perhaps he takes this to be simply a train of thought: I act because I want certain things; this must be why cats, trees, and stones act also; it must even be why God acts.

In any case, the generality of the common supposition that *all* things act on account of ends is notable because it qualifies what critics sometimes call the anthropomorphism of this view, that is, its attribution of human properties to God. Frequently, an anthropomorphic conception of God picks out *distinctively* human characteristics and attributes those characteristics to God. Descartes, for example, might be accused of anthropomorphism if readers think that he finds God to have free will, really, because he takes free will to be distinctively human. The passage above does not find anthropomorphism in this sense. Instead, in it, Spinoza suggests that people

ordinarily take all things—human beings but also waves, tennis balls, penguins, and indeed God—to act on account of ends.

Anthropocentrism is perhaps a better label for the common conception of God's particular purposes. I always seek my own advantage: "men act always on account of an end, viz. on account of their advantage, which they want" (G2/78.21–22). As a result, when I happen to come across something to my advantage, I take it to be the product of some similar desire in nature or God. For example, if the sun warms and fish nourishes me and I typically act in order to get such benefits, then I take the provision of them by nature to be an action similar in kind on my behalf: I would have given myself a fish in order to be nourished; nature has given me a fish; therefore, nature must also have my advantage in mind. This is the sort of reasoning, Spinoza suggests, that leads people commonly to conclude that God has made all things for men (G2/78–79).

In what Spinoza takes to be the common view about God's purpose for creating human beings, finally, a clear form of anthropomorphism arises. When people do things for other people, they typically, Spinoza argues, do so in order to be honored by them. In trying to explain why God would have made so many nice things for us, we tend to turn to this understanding of our own motives. The common explanation for this beneficence in nature, then, is that God makes things for us in order that we might honor God (G2/79.5–8).

Having set out the cause of the common conception of God, Spinoza then turns to argue that it is false: "Nature has no end set before it, and . . . all final causes are nothing but human fictions" (G2/80.3–5). His principal basis for this conclusion is his own account of God's productive activity at 1p16 and 1p32c1–1p32c2. The citation suggests that Spinoza takes the ordinary conception of teleology in nature to incorporate a belief that God has free will. This is the notion that he criticizes in the corollaries following 1p32. God does act freely on Spinoza's view and God may be said to will in a sense, but God does not have free will, and this is what genuine teleology requires, at least on the ordinary conception of it. In short, as Spinoza writes, "all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature" (G2/80.8–9).

The third task that Spinoza sets himself in the Appendix is to explain how the common conception of God's activity gives rise to other false notions. In turning to the detailed part of this argument, Spinoza divides the

false notions into two groups. The first, by which people commonly explain natural things, includes the notions of good, evil, order, confusion, warm, cold, beauty, and ugliness. The second, which arises from the common thought that we ourselves are free, includes the notions of praise, blame, sin, and merit (G2/81.29–32; cf. G2/78.10–12).

Good and evil are Spinoza's clearest and most basic examples of the first sort of notions: "Whatever conduces to health and the worship of God, they have called *good*, but what is contrary to these, *evil*." From the conviction that all things have been made for my sake, Spinoza argues, I will conclude that what serves me is well made, or good, and that what does not serve me is evil. The explanations of other notions are similar and derive from this view. Thus if what I see conduces to my health, Spinoza argues, then I take it to be beautiful. One can infer that, similarly, if something makes me feel hot, I will call the thing warm and if something does not make sense to me, I will call it confused.

Looking ahead in the *Ethics*, this position is perhaps better explained in the preface to *Ethics* 4 where Spinoza's offers a more detailed account of the ordinary view of the good (see §4.1). The principal problem with the ordinary view, Spinoza writes there, is that we take the label "good" to indicate something "positive in things, considered in themselves." Really, he continues, one and the same thing may be good, bad, or indifferent depending upon who is concerned. Thus, "music is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf" (G2/208.8–14). Spinoza's account suggests that the mistake in the ordinary understanding of such concepts is, at least in large part, in taking them to characterize things as their properties, as if music were good, bad, or indifferent on its own. Instead, these concepts may be well-understood, perhaps with other refinements, as relations: music is good for one person, bad for another, and so on. Reading this view back onto the 1 Appendix analysis, it seems likely that Spinoza's conception of beauty, warmth, confusion, and the other concepts that he lists is similar. Thus it is mistaken to say that the ice is cold. It may be at least much better to say that the ice is cold to me.

The second group of concepts is interesting and frequently overlooked. The Appendix begins by taking the ordinary error to start with the conviction that all things—human beings and God and everything else—act with an end in view. These concepts seem to refer back to that more basic

error. From taking ourselves to be free, we build the concepts of praise, blame, sin, and merit on a bad foundation. Unfortunately, Spinoza does not offer a detailed discussion of this error. As he also does with good and evil (4d1–4d2), however, Spinoza recasts these concepts later in the *Ethics*. Praise and blame are passions and, I think, have no genuine normative sense (3p29s). Sin and merit acquire such a sense in the state, where they refer to disobedience and obedience, respectively (4p37s2).

1.4.1 Does Spinoza Reject All Teleology?

In the Appendix, Spinoza criticizes a teleological doctrine: the common belief that God creates all other things for human beings but human beings to worship God. Although he is consistent in regarding this view as false, Spinoza's position there on teleology more generally is not clear and is apparently inconsistent. Notably, he writes, "all final causes are nothing but human fictions" (G2/80.3–5), but he also writes what appears to offer an account of final causation in human desire: "men always act on account an end, their own advantage, which they want" (G2/78.21–22). The textual evidence in the Appendix is puzzling, and it exacerbates broader puzzles about Spinoza's position on final causation in the *Ethics*. Here I introduce the broader issue before returning to the Appendix. Scholars have divided sharply on this issue, and it remains a central topic of debate. On my view, there is no interpretative position on teleology in Spinoza that is unproblematic.

There are historical and textual reasons for taking Spinoza in the *Ethics* to deny all genuine teleology. The historical reason may be found in Descartes's work. Descartes was well known for insisting that we should not try to understand the purposes that God or nature (a phrase he also uses) might have had in creating natural things. This criticism of teleology is epistemological, not metaphysical: Descartes denies, not that God has a purpose in creating natural things, but only that we can (or perhaps that we should try to) understand that purpose. Moreover the qualification of the doctrine that limits its scope to "natural things" invites a reader to wonder whether it may be appropriate to inquire into the purposes of things—including perhaps human beings—that are not natural in the given sense. Spinoza criticizes Cartesian accounts of divine freedom in *Ethics* 1 (1p32c1, 1p33s2). Moreover he expresses a strong naturalism about human

beings; that is, he rejects any view on which human beings are to be understood to be categorically different from other singular things (see, 3Pref and §3.1–§3.1.1 below). There is, then, some reason to think that the *Ethics* expands Descartes's anti-teleological program, giving it an explicit basis in metaphysics and applying it without exception to God, human beings, and other things alike.

Textual reasons for taking Spinoza to deny all teleology, which João Carvalho has brought me to appreciate, may be found in Spinoza's characterization of God, principally in *Ethics* 1, together with his monism and his accounts of the relation between God and singular things. Supposing that anything needs free will or alternative possibilities in order to act with a purpose, Spinoza's God cannot have a purpose. Near the end of *Ethics* 1 (1p32 1p32c1, 1p33s2), Spinoza focuses on the question of free will. Although he takes God to act freely in the sense that God is never necessitated by anything external to God, he emphatically rejects the view that God acts from freedom of the will. Spinoza also denies that God has alternate possibilities for action (1p33). Instead, what God does is necessitated. God—again under this supposition—cannot then act for a purpose. Spinoza's monism, however, requires that there are no other substances, and this leaves only modes to consider. Where we turn to modes, however, Spinoza makes modes' activity God's activity (1p36dem, 3p6dem), and he appears to regard all causal activity whatever as God's activity (1p25, 1p28, and 1p28s). Although it is not the case that everything that is true of God is true of modes—some modes, for example, are divisible but God is not—these doctrines suggest that modes do not differ from God in their causal activity. If God cannot act with a purpose, then, these doctrines suggest, finite things also cannot act with a purpose, a conclusion that receives some further textual support in Spinoza's argument that human beings also do not have free will (2p48).

There are, despite this evidence, also strong reasons for taking Spinoza to accept certain kinds of teleology. The most explicit criticisms of teleology in God in the Appendix emphasize what we might call *thoughtful teleology*, a view on which a thing's conscious purpose or aim explains or causes its action. The conflicting evidence in the Appendix, it may be thought, leaves open the question of whether Spinoza accepts any finite thoughtful teleology, such as teleology in human desire. The question of whether there is *nonthoughtful teleology* in finite things also remains.

Spinoza might be thought to present such a view at 3p6, where he argues that all finite things strive to persevere in being. Perseverance in being, so understood, might explain or cause a thing's activity even in when it is neither a conscious goal of God in creating the thing nor of the thing itself in acting (see §3.2 and §3.2.3).

1.4.2 How Does *Ethics* 1 Appendix Relate to the Account of God in the TTP?

Spinoza's account of common prejudices about God in the Appendix is highly critical. He takes the view to be false. He also takes it to be harmful at least insofar as it leads to further false views about good, evil, and other evaluative notions. In another work, however, Spinoza is much less critical of a very similar conception of God. In Chapter Fourteen of his TTP, Spinoza presents seven tenets of universal faith (*fidei universalis dogmata*). The tenets are supposed to be the fundamental principles of the entirety of scripture (G3/177.14–15). They are also beliefs held by all honest men (G3/177.5–6) and beliefs necessary for obedience (G3/177.10; G3/178.14). The Appendix to *Ethics* 1 and the seven tenets, then, matter to our understanding of the extent to which Spinoza's two major works are part of a consistent doctrine.

A comparison of the tenets to the doctrine of the *Ethics* requires detailed study. Nevertheless the contrast between the tenets and Spinoza's view in the Appendix can be shown briefly in one point of clear contrast. Here are abbreviated versions of tenets 3, 4, and 7:

III. He is present everywhere, or everything is open to him. If people believed some things were hidden from him . . . they would have doubts about the equity of the justice by which he directs all things.

IV. He has the supreme right and dominion over all things, and does nothing because he is compelled by a law, but acts only according to his absolute good pleasure and special grace. For everyone is absolutely bound to obey him, whereas he is not bound to obey anyone.

VII. [W]hoever firmly believes that God, out of mercy and the grace by which he directs everything, pardons men's sins . . . that person really knows Christ according to the Spirit, and Christ is in him.

In these tenets, Spinoza claims that God directs all things (*omnia dirigit*) (tenets 3 and 7) from his "absolute good pleasure" (*absoluto beneplacito*) (tenet 4). It is, however, one of the emphatic claims of *Ethics* 1 that God

does not direct all things according to justice, mercy, grace, or any other standard. Rather, Spinoza writes, it is part of the foundational error that people commonly think that God directs things at all: “Indeed they hold it to be certain that God directs all things to some certain end, (*Deum omnia ad certum aliquem finem dirigere*), for they say that God has made all things for man and man for the worship of God” (G2/78.4–6). In the course of the Appendix, Spinoza repeatedly uses “*dirigere*” in this way to describe mistaken views about God’s activity (G2/79.7, G2/79.10–12).

One of the principal bases for this conclusion is that God does not, in fact, act from absolute good pleasure, which Spinoza associates with free will. Indeed, this is claim that opens the Appendix:

With these [demonstrations] I have explained God’s nature and properties: . . . and finally, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from freedom of the will or absolute good pleasure [*absoluto beneplacito*], but from God’s absolute nature, or infinite power.

The interpretative issue here is difficult, and critics have had widely different views about the relation between the *Ethics* and the TTP. For any general view, however, 1 Appendix is critical. It is Spinoza’s discussion and criticism of popular beliefs about God, which are a central subject of the TTP.

Recommended Reading

- Carriero, John. 2005. “Spinoza on Final Causality.” *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 2: 105–147. (A powerful argument suggesting that Spinoza rejects teleology.)
- Curley, Edwin. 1969. *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (This important work includes Curley’s interpretation of the laws of nature in Spinoza.)
- Della Rocca, Michael. 2008. *Spinoza*. New York: Routledge. (An interpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy that emphasizes the importance of the PSR.)
- Di Poppa, Francesca. 2013. “Spinoza on Causation and Power.” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51 (3): 297–319. (An account of the fundamental importance of power in the *Ethics*.)
- Garber, Daniel. 2008. “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?” In *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, edited by Charlie Huenemann, 166–187. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (An elegant, well-documented argument about the relation between the TTP and the *Ethics*.)
- Garber, Daniel. 2015. “Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53 (3): 507–521. (Good-natured but fierce opposition to views on which the PSR is central to the *Ethics*.)
- Garrett, Don. 1979. “Spinoza’s ‘Ontological’ Argument.” *The Philosophical Review* 88 (2): 198–223. Reprinted with additional commentary in Garrett 2018. (An essay that founded recent intense interest in the role PSR in Spinoza.)

- Garrett, Don. 1999. "Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism." In *New Essays on the Rationalists*, edited by Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann, 310–335. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (A powerful argument for the presence of teleology in Spinoza.)
- Garrett, Don. 2018. *Necessity and Nature in Spinoza's Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Collection of classic articles on Spinoza.)
- Gueroult, Martial. 1968. *Spinoza I: Dieu*. Paris: Aubier Montaigne. (A seminal study of *Ethics* 1.)
- Jarrett, Charles. 1978. "The Logical Structure of Spinoza's Ethics, Part I." *Synthese* 37 (1): 15–65. (Influential study of relations in *Ethics* 1.)
- LeBuffe, Michael. 2018. *Spinoza on Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press. (My interpretation of reason in Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics.)
- Leibniz, G. W. 1976. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Edited and translated by Leroy Loemker. 2 vols. Dordrecht: Kluwer. (A collection that includes Leibniz's notes on the *Ethics*.)
- Lin, Martin. 2006. "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza." *The Philosophical Review* 115 (3): 317–354. (An influential characterization of teleology in the *Ethics*.)
- Lin, Martin. 2018. "The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza." In *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, edited by Michael Della Rocca, 133–154. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (A first attempt at finding the PSR in the *Ethics*.)
- Lin, Martin. 2019. *Being and Reason: An Essay on Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Lin's recent book includes a different, but still thoughtful account of the PSR in Spinoza.)
- Newlands, Samuel. 2018. *Reconceiving Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Interpretation of Spinoza emphasizing different relations and the *Ethics* and championing conception.)
- Viljanen, Valtteri. 2011. *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Elegant presentation of the importance of power to Spinoza.)
- Wilson, Margaret. 1999b. "Spinoza's Causal Axiom (*Ethics* I, Axiom 4)." In *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy*, 141–165. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Seminal essay on this critical axiom.)

Spinoza in Literature

- Eliot, George. 1986. *Middlemarch*. Edited by David Carroll. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (Eliot was perhaps the first translator of the *Ethics* into English. A new edition, edited by Clare Carlisle, appeared in 2020 from Princeton University Press.)
- Goldstein, Rebecca Newberger. 2010. *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*. New York: Pantheon.
- Goldstein, Rebecca Newberger. 2018. "Literary Spinoza." In *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, edited by Michael Della Rocca. New York: Oxford University Press, 627–666. (A scholarly account of Spinoza in literature that includes substantial discussion of Borges.)
- Kadish, Rachel. 2017. *The Weight of Ink*. Melbourne: Harcourt.

2

The Idea of the Human Body

In one of his earliest works, Spinoza maintained the view that the true and highest good is enjoyment of “knowledge of the union that the mind has with whole of nature” (TIE §13). This view endured, and Part 2 of the *Ethics* reflects it. While infinite things necessarily follow in infinite ways from the essence of God, he acknowledges in the part’s preface, the rest of the *Ethics* will concern only those consequences “that can lead us by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness” (G2/84). The treatment of the human mind in *Ethics* 2 includes discussion of many subjects familiar to students of philosophy of mind and epistemology, including perception (2p17s), error (2p35, 2p41), knowledge (2p40s), and will (2p49c). Where, however, the views are difficult or unusual, it can help readers to bear this long-held view in mind. Looking back to *Ethics* 1, Spinoza adheres to his conviction that the human mind is united with the whole of nature. Looking forward, he is interested in our knowledge of ourselves and in the human good.

The basic, striking characterization of the human being and the human mind in *Ethics* 2 emerges from the intimate connection that Spinoza finds between the human being and nature. A human being is not a substance (2p10). Instead, it is a mode and, therefore, fully dependent upon and in God. The human mind—that same familiar entity that thinks, desires, knows, and has volitions—is an idea of an existing finite mode of extension; that is, it is the idea of the human body (2p11, 2p13). In order to arrive from his general account of the one substance in *Ethics* 1 to an account of the kinds of modes—finite bodies and finite minds—that we are, Spinoza begins *Ethics* 2 with a dramatic narrowing of topic, which includes accounts of those particular attributes, among God’s infinite attributes, that matter to us and of the place of modes within those attributes (2d1–2p9c). From this point, Spinoza describes the human body, the human mind, and those ideas—ideas of sensation and other ideas that we have in our interaction with external things—that might seem most to require an

intimate connection between mind and body (2p10–2p18s). With this basic account of the human being in place, he proceeds to focus, as the Preface promises, on mind. *Ethics* 2p19–2p36 concerns the sorts of ideas, inadequate ideas (*ideae inadaequatae*), that can lead to error. The propositions that follow, 2p37–2p49s, concern those of our ideas, adequate ideas (*ideae adaequatae*), in which we may be said to have knowledge. This chapter includes sections on each of these groups of claims.

2.1 From Infinite Substance to Thought and Extension: 2d1–2p9c

The opening of *Ethics* 2 may seem disjointed. Spinoza emphasizes humanity in the Preface. The definitions and, especially, the axioms that follow reinforce this theme in their accounts of body (2d1); mind and ideas (2d3, 2d4); and humanity explicitly (2a1, 2a2, 2a4, 2a5). The first nine propositions of *Ethics* 2, however, neither mention human beings nor cite any of the definitions or axioms. Instead, they concern God, attributes, and modes. Their demonstrations cite fundamental claims of Spinoza's metaphysics, such as the causal axiom, 1a4, and Spinoza's definition of God, 1d6. These propositions may therefore seem to belong more readily to *Ethics* 1 than to an account of the human mind.

It is correct to think that the opening propositions of *Ethics* 2 address many questions that the account of the one substance in *Ethics* 1 raises. Nevertheless, they may also be understood as a first, critical step in Spinoza's account of the human mind, a step toward showing precisely how it is united with the whole of nature. So understood, the new definitions and axioms set out those notions that Spinoza needs to ground firmly in his metaphysics in order to demonstrate this unity. Then, from 2p1–2p9c, Spinoza draws from his account of the one substance further accounts of thought, extension, finite ideas, and finite bodies to which the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 2 can apply in explaining the finite idea and finite body that matter most to us.

The definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 2 lack the relatively uniform character and relevance to Spinoza's arguments of their counterparts in *Ethics* 1. Although 2d4–2d7 offer accounts of terms important to much of the discussion that follows, for example, none of these definitions are cited in *Ethics* 2. Indeed, Spinoza cites neither 2d5 nor 2d7 in the entire work.

Unlike the axioms of *Ethics* 1, the axioms of *Ethics* 2 do include uses of terms—“essence,” “body,” “singular things,” “mode”—defined in what precedes them, which undermines any status that they might have as truths that hold independently of the rest of the *Ethics*. These are reasons for discriminating, in building interpretations of Spinoza’s definitions and axioms, among various parts of the *Ethics*.

Despite their underutilization, the definitions and axioms explain many notions that Spinoza employs in his account of the human being that begins at 2p10, and he might have drawn upon them more explicitly than he did. In introducing them here, I will suggest that they amount to a metaphysical schema that links notions basic to Spinoza’s metaphysics (attribute, mode, substance, essence) to notions basic to his account of the human being (body, mind).

To begin with body, in the definitions, Spinoza makes a body: “a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing” (2d1). That is, a body is a finite mode of the attribute of extension. This will be the most general metaphysical account of the human body.

The definition of “idea” (2d3) is less helpful for an account of the human mind, but Spinoza’s axioms do help readers to understand the sort of thoughtful being that a human mind is:

2a2: Man thinks.

2a4: We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways.

2a5: We neither feel nor perceive any singular things except bodies and modes of thinking.

While we are bodies, then, we are also in some way of the attribute of thought (2a2). This existence associates closely in some way with our body (2a4), in that we “feel” (*sentimus*) a certain body and we neither feel nor “perceive” anything other than minds or bodies (2a5). We are, then, thoughtful things, modes of thought that are closely united with a certain body and restricted in the objects of our perceptions of singular things to particular bodies and ideas.

Finally, although Spinoza discusses essence extensively in Part 1, where he also incorporates the discussion of the essence of finite things (as at 1p24) and human essence (as, albeit in terms of human nature, at 1p8s2), 2d2 and 2a1 inform Spinoza’s account, in particular, of human essence.

First (here I condense 2d2) Spinoza makes essence that without which a thing can neither be nor be conceived. That is, the essence of any thing is necessary and sufficient for its existence and conception. Spinoza's discussion of God and finite things at 1p11dem2 suggests a view that is more detailed and perhaps puzzling. Considering the "reason" or "cause" for an existent in that discussion as well as an existent's nature, Spinoza maintains there that in some things, substances, their nature will be sufficient as well as necessary for their existence. In others, finite existents, their nature is merely a necessary condition. They will have a nature such that their existence or non-existence depends upon something else. At 2a1, Spinoza asserts that human beings belong in the latter category: "the essence of man does not involve necessary existence." This characterization, like 1p11dem2, explains human finitude in terms of dependence: if we exist, our existence arises at least in part from and depends upon external factors. Thus duration, "an indefinite continuation of existing" (2d5), applies to us, and we are singular things (2d7).

Together, these passages suggest that finite things have a sort of twofold existence. If there is an essence of a human being, then, by 2d2, the human being exists in some sense, but, by 1p11dem2, the human being needs external factors in order to exist, presumably in some other sense. Perhaps a way to understand these senses of exist is to emphasize time and place. If there is an essence of Art Blakey, then by 2d2 it is certain, an eternal truth, that Art Blakey exists at some time and place. Where and when Art Blakey exists in time and space is then a function of external circumstance, the reason or cause of 1p11dem2.

The definition of "singular things" further qualifies human beings. It associates being a singular thing with causal efficacy and suggests that being a singular thing can be an incremental matter:

2d7: By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.

On the account that I have given of 2d2 (and looking ahead to 3p6 and 3p7, see §3.2), each human being has a characteristic effect: their own existence. Given the restrictions on our ability to have this effect that 2a1 and 2d5 emphasize, it is clear that our power to bring about the effect of our own existence is variable and defeasible. By the definition of "singular things,"

then, a number of individuals is a singular thing to the extent that this collection brings about its own existence. As we shall see, Spinoza takes the human being to be such a composite individual, so each of us is a singular thing, by 2d7, to some extent.

What Spinoza needs to draw from his metaphysics, according to this schema, in order to describe the human mind are accounts of the attributes of thought and extension; of finite and determinate modes of those attributes; and of the relations between such modes. Although there is no mention of the human mind at 2p1–2p9, these propositions offer such accounts and so show how, on the account of the *Ethics*, the account of the human being follows from the account of God.

The opening propositions establish, what Spinoza has hinted in *Ethics* 1 (1d2, 1p21dem, 1p32dem), that thought and extension are attributes of God. The demonstration to 2p1 is an argument a posteriori: from the fact that modes of thought exist, we can know (because modes are in a substance) that the attribute of thought exists. Spinoza suggests at the brief demonstration to 2p2 that a similar argument applies *mutatis mutandis* (i.e., changing what needs to be changed) to extension. The scholium to 2p1 may provide an argument that better reflects his basic commitments. A thinking being, Spinoza argues there, might be infinite; because an infinite thinking being might be conceived, thought is an attribute of God. The argument depends upon the definitions of “attribute” (1d4) and, implicitly, “God” (1d6) and so might be understood to proceed a priori. Perhaps—if we can understand conceivability at 2p1s and intellect at 1d4 independently of some particular thought—we need not assume in the argument that some mode of thought exists.

Propositions 3–5 are, in the apparatus of the *Ethics*, a somewhat isolated unit: Spinoza cites 2p3 in the demonstration to 2p5 and 2p9c, but otherwise cites none of these propositions. They may, however, do more work in showing how Spinoza situates the human being in relation to God than their formal use indicates. Whereas 2p1 and 2p2 treat thought and extension in the same way, these propositions concern the intentionality of thought (by this I mean that ideas are always *of* something or have some object) and so suggest a sort of asymmetry between thought and extension. For example, by 2p5, any given idea is caused by something thoughtful—and, more precisely, by God considered as a thinking thing—and not by its object. A

given body is not of anything; it does not have an object. Therefore Spinoza need not offer a similar argument for given bodies.

Spinoza refers at 2p5 to the “formal being” (*esse formale*) of ideas, a notion that is prominent also in discussions that follow (particularly 2p7c). Formal reality is the kind of ordinary existence had by, we might think, ideas and extended things. Objective being, by contrast, is existence as the intentional object of something that has an object. Thus, if Singer’s Fischelson is thinking about the cat at the window, his idea may have furriness and blackness objectively but not formally. The cat, not the idea, is furry. To return to extension, the cat itself might be furry and black formally but, because it does not have an object, will have no properties objectively and no objective being.

The propositions that follow, 2p6–2p9, narrow the discussion to the topic of finite modes. Spinoza cites each of these propositions, their corollaries, and their scholia extensively in the rest of the *Ethics*, and they have been a focus of critical discussion. It is easiest, I think, to consider 2p6 and 2p7 at once:

2p6: The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.

2p7: The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.

Proposition 6 appears to generalize 2p5 (although Spinoza does not cite 2p5 in its demonstration) to all attributes. Just as, by 2p5, any mode of thought has God for a cause only insofar as God is thinking, so, generally, any mode of any attribute has God for a cause only insofar as God is considered under that attribute. Thus, 2p6 rejects any doctrine on which anything of a given attribute has any causes (or effects) in another. For example, it permits a view under which another physical thing, such as a cue stick (insofar, of course, as the cue stick expresses the causal power of God) causes a physical thing, such as a billiard ball, to move. It rejects, however, any view on which any mental entity—such as my desire to move the ball—could cause a billiard ball to move, and it rejects any view on which a physical thing, such as a billiard ball, could cause an idea, such as the thought of a billiard ball that I have upon seeing it. The motion of the ball must have a physical cause, and my idea of the ball must have a thoughtful cause. The demonstration of this proposition invokes (as 2p5 does) 1p10, the

proposition that each attribute of God must be conceived through itself, and 1a4, the axiom on which the knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves the knowledge of its cause. The detailed interpretation of 2p6 requires us to understand how it follows from these premises that effects of given attributes only have causes of the same attributes.

At 2p7, and again on the basis of 1a4, Spinoza goes further, asserting that the causal order of ideas is in some sense the same as the causal order of things. If we limit ourselves to ideas of bodies and bodies—an artificial limitation, but one that is in the spirit of Spinoza’s focus in *Ethics* 2 on the human being—the doctrine suggests that for each corporeal cause there is a correlate thoughtful cause and for each corporeal effect, there is a correlate thoughtful effect, and vice-versa (a view, I argue at the end of §1.1, that the axioms of *Ethics* 1 anticipate). These correlates suggest a strategy for explanations of apparent cases of mind-body interaction that accommodate 2p6: it is not my desire (a mode of thought) to move the billiard ball (a mode of extension) that moves it; instead, it is the correlate in extension of my desire (the relevant brain state, perhaps) that causes this corporeal effect.

A scholium to 2p7 complements the doctrine of the proposition. Spinoza refers there to the argument to substance monism in *Ethics* 1, recalling that, on his view, the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance comprehended under different attributes. He goes on to assert, in terms similar to those of Maimonides, that the same doctrine applies to modes: “so also a mode of extension and the idea of that modes are one and the same thing but expressed in two ways.” Considered independently of Spinoza’s other doctrines, such a view helps to explain 2p7. It allows us to say, for example, that my desire, after a fashion—that is, considered as a body and not as an idea—does, after all, cause the billiard ball to move.

A corollary that Spinoza adds may be helpful for the interpretation of his view because, although Spinoza cites only 2p7 in its demonstration, it incorporates language that one might take to refer to other propositions in the *Ethics*:

From this it follows that God’s power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting. That is, whatever follows formally from God’s infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection.

The most explicit discussion of God's power occurs at the end of *Ethics* 1 (see §1.3). As we have just seen, 2p5 uses the language of formal and objective being to offer an account of causation in the attribute of thought. The corollary, then, gives readers further resources, Spinoza's accounts of power, to use in the interpretation of 2p7 and related doctrines.

The final propositions and corollaries leading to Spinoza's explicit account of the human being in *Ethics* 2 emphasize the existence and non-existence of finite things. At 2p8, Spinoza argues that singular things that do not exist nevertheless exist in some way in God. Then, in a corollary and scholium, he describes that existence. The corollary helpfully emphasizes temporal language: "so long" (*quamdiu*) as a given singular thing does not exist, its idea exists only insofar as it is in God's infinite idea, but "when" (*ubi*) the thing exists it has duration and its idea also has a kind of durational existence.

The doctrine is difficult. The temporal language suggests, however, that the non-existents of interest to Spinoza in these passages are entities that do exist at some time or other but happen not to exist now. There is reason to think that, for Spinoza, there are in God no ideas of singular things that never exist. A winged horse, even if it is not impossible in its own nature, will be impossible given all of extension (2p49s, G2/134). Instead, Spinoza has in view particular existents without respect to the time during which they exist: my great-grandmother no longer exists, though she did; I exist now, but before I did not and later, I will not; and so on. The discussion foreshadows Spinoza's account of the sense in which the human mind is eternal inasmuch as it distinguishes human existence without respect to time from our durational existence (see 5p21–5p23, and §5.4 below).

The discussion at 2p9 offers further detail. Spinoza argues there that God causes the idea of a given singular thing in two different senses: insofar as God is infinite; and insofar as God is "considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing which actually exists." The first sense is eternal: a complete understanding of God will include an understanding of any singular thing that exists at one time or another. The second refers to temporal existence: God causes the singular mind to exist, when it finally does so, insofar as God is the particular things that, in accordance with 1p28, cause it to exist. At 2p9, then, Spinoza may invoke the two causal orders that might seem also to be present at 1p19–1p28 (see §1.1.1 and §1.3.2). The relation of the human being to God can seem very remote in

the second sense, under which it is only insofar Nature manifests itself in the whole causal order that the individual human being arises from God. In the first sense, however, the relation is immediate and intimate. My being just is an aspect of God's being, and its every detail follows necessarily from God's necessity.

2.1.1 What Is an Attribute?

Central claims about attributes in *Ethics* 1 are difficult to interpret individually and also difficult to reconcile. Spinoza maintains that any attribute is what the intellect (*intellectus*) perceives as constituting (*constituens*) the essence of God (1d4) and that God consists (*constantem*) of infinite attributes, each of which expresses (*exprimit*) eternal and infinite essence (1d6). The qualification "intellect perceives as" and the complex verbs are challenging. If, however, one simply replaces the complex constructions in each definition with "is," a puzzle results on which God is each attribute and God is all of the infinite attributes. The move may seem crude, but it does have some support. Spinoza's basic metaphysical commitments (at 1d3, 1d5, and 1a1), after all, require that nothing exists other than substances and modes, suggesting that attributes must just be one or the other, and he draws this conclusion himself in the demonstration to 1p4 where he also writes "substances, or what is the same (by 1d4), their attributes" (see also Letter 9 at G4/46.20).

As I note above (§1.1.2), it may be possible to find a way to move between the definitions that is more subtle: an attribute is what expresses the essence of substance, and for a thing to express the essence of substance is for that thing to be what intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance. This reconciliation of the two formulas puts weight on what Spinoza means by "intellect perceives as" at 1d4 because it suggests that 1d6 invokes the same notion implicitly. So understood, the tension between 1d4 and 1d6 may be restated. How is it that attributes collectively constitute God even while each alone is what the intellect perceives as God's essence?

It may be helpful, then, to understand interpretative options in terms of the intellect's perception. First, we might take "intellect" at 1d4 to refer either to infinite intellect or specifically—since finite intellects are not different from God's intellect—to a finite intellect. Spinoza associates intellect, in a finite mind, with its adequate ideas (1p15s or, most clearly,

5p40c) and all of God's ideas are adequate (2p36dem), so on either reading what the intellect perceives is adequate and true. Second, since perceptions need not be adequate, we might take intellect's perception of an attribute as the essence of God to be adequate or, as Hegel does, to be inadequate.

A reader of the *Ethics* is in a better position after 2p9 to understand these options. The most important additional evidence includes 1p10, its scholium, 1p34–1p36, and the arguments of *Ethics* 2 through 2p7cs. In the course of presenting his account of the one substance, Spinoza argues that each attribute must be conceived through itself (1p10) and that this shows that the attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (1p10s). Descartes's Meditator famously contends that, because his mind and body are really distinct, they may exist apart (AT 7 78). The claim at 1p10s might suggest to readers of the *Ethics*, then, that the different attributes may exist apart. Spinoza maintains, however, that there is only one indivisible substance (1p13, 1p14). However, we take real distinctness to inform Spinoza's account, it is no indicator of separability.

The final propositions of *Ethics* 1 offer a substantive account of God's essence. God's power is God's essence (1p34), and whatever is in God's power necessarily exists (1p35) and has effects (1p36). These propositions may yield material accounts of 1d4 and 1d6 on which an attribute is what the intellect perceives as God's power, and God's power might be so perceived in infinite ways. The necessity of all existents (by 1p35) and their effects (by 1p36) might be understood from any understanding of God's power.

Further constraints on the interpretation of the theory of attributes arise in the detailed metaphysics that opens *Ethics* 2. Spinoza introduces particular attributes, thought and extension (2p1 and 2p2). He offers a definition of "essence" (2d2), which one might take to inform his uses of that term at 1d4 and 1d6. Spinoza makes strong claims about attributes at 2p5 and 2p6, and the demonstrations to these propositions include substantive uses of 1p10, which contribute to our understanding of that proposition. Finally, Spinoza's characterizations of the attributes and their modes at 2p7s offer several informative uses of "attribute" as well, I think, as enlightening references to earlier passages.

While the perception of intellect raises difficult questions for the interpretation of Spinoza's theory of attributes, it also marks a profound commitment to intelligibility. If we do grant that, on Spinoza's account, an

attribute is what intellect adequately perceives as God's essence and that God is God's attributes, then the reference to intellect at 1d4 yields the conclusion that God is wholly intelligible in the sense that God may be entirely understood by intellect. That is, employing now the propositions from the end of *Ethics* 1, all existence and the causal power of all existence are intelligible in this way. Both are adequately understood in any attribute, so the perception of God in any attribute must be the perception of the same existents and power. These are themes of 2p6, 2p6c, 2p7, and 2p7s. To the extent that "intellect" at 1d4 is finite intellect, then, Spinoza's view is that all of this is intelligible *to us*.

2.1.2 What Restrictions Do 2p6 and 2p7 Place on Conception and Causation?

In critical steps toward his characterization of modes at 2p7s, Spinoza repeatedly invokes 1p10 and 1a4. Most clearly at the demonstration to 2p6, this reasoning moves from the characterization of conception to the characterization of causation. Here is a schematic presentation of that demonstration:

1. Each attribute is conceived through itself without any other. (1p10)
2. Therefore, the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute but no other attribute.
3. The knowledge of an effect involves the knowledge of its cause. (1a4, edited)
4. Therefore, the modes of each attribute have God for a cause only insofar as he is considered under their attribute. (2p6)

Line 1 suggests that, in conceiving a given attribute, intellect conceives only that attribute. Spinoza takes line 1 to imply line 2, and we may take it at least to gloss line 1: anything that intellect conceives in a given attribute involves only the concept of that attribute. Thus, when I conceive extension, I conceive only extension, and when I conceive an extended thing, that conception involves only extension. Commentators frequently refer to this or a similar doctrine as the "conceptual barrier" between the attributes.

Spinoza moves from this conceptual barrier to a claim about causation in line 4 by means of 1a4. His reasoning, roughly, is that it is axiomatic that knowledge of a mode is knowledge of the mode's cause. Because we have established also that knowledge of a mode is knowledge of that mode's

attribute only, we may conclude that what we know, in knowing the mode's cause, is further knowledge of that attribute only: a thing's cause must be of the same attribute as the thing itself. Commentators frequently refer to this further doctrine, or something similar, as the "causal barrier" between the attributes.

Spinoza clearly puts a certain priority on conception in this demonstration: because there is a conceptual barrier, we conclude that there is a causal barrier. Spinoza's forceful use of the doctrine in his criticism of Descartes's views about mind-body union (G2/279.25–G2/280.3) and interaction (G2/280.4–21) in the preface to *Ethics* 5 similarly emphasize conception:

[W]hat . . . does he understand by the union of Mind and Body? What clear and distinct concept does he have of a thought so closely united to some little portion of quantity? . . . I wish he had explained this union by its proximate cause. But he had conceived the Mind to be so distinct from the body that he could not assign any singular cause.

In his criticism, Spinoza suggests that Descartes cannot understand his own view, cannot form a clear and distinct concept of it, and cannot give a causal account of it because the clear conception that did have made such an account impossible (for further discussion, see §5.1).

It is unclear, however, whether this priority in argument reflects any kind of metaphysical priority. Indeed, Spinoza seems to reject such a view at 2p6c:

[T]he formal being of things which are not modes of thinking does not follow from the divine nature because God has first known the things; rather the objects of ideas follow and are inferred from their attributes in the same way . . . that ideas follow from the attribute of thought.

While the argument of the *Ethics* proceeds from a doctrine concerning conception to another concerning causation, this passage suggests, it is not clear that God conceives things, in some way, prior to other causal activity. Because comprehensive interpretations of Spinoza can tend to emphasize ideas or conception, the issue of the priority of conception to causation is a lively area of debate.

While 2p6 emphasizes God's causal activity, 2p7 emphasizes a causal order and so the causal activity of finite things, a reason to think, once again, that two causal orders, a finite order from God to singular things and

another infinite order of finite things, structure Spinoza's presentation of his metaphysics. The demonstration to 2p7 is brief:

1. The idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect. (1a4, edited)
2. Therefore, The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things. (2p7)

By 2p6, I can know that a mode of extension has God for a cause insofar as God is extended because any extended effect involves only the attribute of extension. By 2p7, if I know that a given mode of extension is the effect of another mode of extension, then I can know that the idea of the first mode depends on the idea of the second.

In comparing 2p6 and 2p7, some of the mysterious relations that characterize the definition and axioms of *Ethics* 1 may seem to matter. That is why I have edited 1a4 in my schematic presentations of the demonstrations. Spinoza's use of 1a4 at 2p6's demonstration (and also 2p5dem) invokes the relation "x involves y." His use at 2p7 invokes a different relation, "x depends on y." The complete axiom includes both relations, so it seems that Spinoza's choice to name just one relation in these demonstrations—and a different relation for 2p7 than for 2p5–2p6—matters. This is another salient interpretative issue.

A final complication is introduced by the asymmetry between thought and extension that begins to be evident in *Ethics* 2 with Spinoza's repeated reference to the formal being of ideas. Ideas—modes of thought—have intentional objects but other modes, such as modes of extension, do not. This complication affects the interpretation of conception and causation alike. With respect to conception, it suggests that, on a strong reading of the conceptual barrier between the attributes, an idea of a body cannot be explained by any reference to body. This is difficult to understand and is either a serious problem for Spinoza or, as Karolina Hübner has argued, a serious problem for strong readings of the conceptual barrier. For causation, the intentionality of ideas suggests that 2p7 is more complicated than it may first appear. Because ideas need not only have bodies for objects, the "things" in the order and connection of things might be modes of body, of mind, or of other attributes. That is, there are ideas of ideas, ideas of bodies, and, although human minds cannot have them except very abstractly, ideas of modes of other attributes of God. These are all things. How precisely

Spinoza takes the order of ideas to be the same as the order of things, then, is a difficult question.

2.1.3 Modes, Human Beings, and the Tschirnhaus Correspondence

Together, Spinoza's more detailed account of attributes and the causal and conceptual arguments of *Ethics* 2p5–2p7 yield a more detailed metaphysics of modes, on which “a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways” (2p7s). Spinoza's theories of substance, attribute, conception and causation, and infinite and finite modes will matter to the interpretation of this view. This particular formulation, however, raises two pressing questions. First, while there are infinite attributes, Spinoza writes here of a thing expressed in (only) two ways. What is such an entity with respect to infinite attributes? Is a human being, for example, a bit of extension and thought but not of any other attribute? Second, Spinoza writes here, not of any two attributes, but of extension and thought. We have seen that there is asymmetry between extension and thought because thought, but not extension, has objects, a theme of 2p5–2p7. Is the claim here that the two modes are one and the same thing a continuation of that theme, or is this sameness a relation different from that intentional relation?

Here are four possible interpretations of the 2p7s claim. Because, to anticipate, a person is a mode of extension and an idea, I will use a human being, Maugham's painter, Lawson, as an example of a mode:

Bivalence: Lawson is a mode of extension, a mode of thought (i.e., the idea of that mode), and nothing else, and the two modes are the same thing.

Multivalence: Lawson is a mode of extension, a mode of thought, a mode of infinitely many other attributes, and nothing else, and all the modes are the same thing.

Bivalent transcendence: Lawson is fundamentally a mode of substance, who is perceived as extension and as thought and as nothing else. These expressions are of the same thing because they are both of Lawson.

Multivalent transcendence: Lawson is fundamentally a mode of substance, who is perceived as extension and as thought and as infinitely many other attributes. These perceptions are of the same thing because they are all of Lawson.

The transcendent views have strengths. They explain how modes of different attributes can be the same. We can understand, in their expression of the same mode of substance, L, for example, the sense in which a mode

of extension, L_E , and a mode of thought, L_T , are the same. The views similarly promise a neat explanation of 2p7. The deep order and connection of things, on this view, is an order of modes of substance, and it is the same in modes of thought and in modes of extension just because those attributes express substance and so reproduce the order.

The lack of textual support for a transcendental view is a concern, however. Spinoza refers at 2p6 and 2p7 to modes of extension and modes of thought rather than to perceptions of modes. His definition of God suggests, moreover, that God just is all of God's attributes. An account of God's relation to modes near the end of 2p7s reflects this conception of God: "So of things as they are in themselves, God is really the cause insofar as he consists of infinite attributes." It suggests that the best understanding of God is the understanding of a substance consisting of infinite attributes. If God does not transcend attributes, it is difficult to understand how a mode could do so.

Finally, the formal-objective distinction in ideas presents hurdles for transcendent views. On any transcendent view, $Lawson_E$ and $Lawson_T$ are one and the same thing because both are *Lawson*. In addition, Spinoza's claims about formal existence suggest that $Lawson_T$ has an object in $Lawson_E$, whereas $Lawson_E$ has no object. For multivalent transcendence, this point forces a more complex, unappealing metaphysics of perception onto the elegant interpretation. Are there different modes of thought, $Lawson_{Te}$, $Lawson_{Tf}$, and so on, that have objects in modes of each other attribute? Or perhaps $Lawson_T$ is one and the same as $Lawson_E$ and also one and the same as $Lawson_F$ (*Lawson* under some third attribute), but $Lawson_E$ is not one and the same as $Lawson_F$? For bivalent transcendence one might be moved by the status of ideas to maintain that a mode of thought will have a mode of extension as its object but will express something different, a mode of substance. On such a view, the attractive elegance of the interpretation is lost because a mode of extension will only express the mode of substance and have no symmetrical relation to thought.

These points support bivalence or multivalence, but they may not be decisive. In adjudicating among different interpretive options, Spinoza's correspondence with Tschirnhaus matters. In response to Tschirnhaus's questions about this issue, Spinoza writes, "the idea of the human body neither involves nor expresses any other attributes of God besides these two

[viz. thought and extension]” (Letter 64, July 1675). Tschirnhaus’s response reflects something like multivalent transcendence: “why [does] the mind, which represents a certain modification, a modification expressed not only in extension, but also in infinite other ways . . . perceive only the modification expressed through extension, i.e., the human body, and no other expression through other attributes?” (Letter 65, August 1675). Spinoza responds, “I say that although each thing is expressed in infinite ways in the infinite intellect of God, nevertheless those infinite ideas by which it is expressed cannot constitute one and the same Mind of a singular thing, but infinitely many, since each of the infinite ideas has no connection with any other, as I’ve explained in 2p7s and as is evident from 1p10” (Letter 66, August 1675, translation modified).

Spinoza’s response does not flatly contradict a transcendent view. Spinoza does, however, appear to assert that each mode of each attribute has a “mind”; that is, he appears to endorse a view on which there is an idea of each mode of every other attribute, which is “one and the same thing” as that mode. The view, therefore, appears to accommodate the formal-objective reality of ideas by associating it with the relation that makes modes of different attributes one and the same thing. The view implies that there are many more modes of thought than of any other attribute. Spinoza’s assertion that “each thing” is expressed in infinite ways suggests multivalence, but his assertion that the infinitely many different minds of this thing have no connection with one another makes it difficult to understand precisely how these unconnected ideas, or their objects, can be a single thing. They are certainly not a single thing in the same sense that a mind and body are “one and the same thing.”

2.2 The Human Mind and the Human Body: 2p10–2p18s

In the propositions following his account of the metaphysics of singular things, 2p10–2p18s, Spinoza offers a substantive account of the singular thing of special interest, the human being. This account conforms to constraints imposed by the metaphysical propositions: a human being is a mode of thought and a mode of extension, and, as such, is in God; these modes occupy the same place in a single causal order but do not interact causally with one another; they are also, in some sense, one and the same thing.

Spinoza's account of the human being also draws substantively, however, upon two further sources of detail: the axioms of *Ethics* 2, including those that characterize our experience and so offer an intimate account of human mental life; and an account of body in a scholium to 2p13. A brief explanation following the final axiom at the beginning of *Ethics* 2 associates the axioms and this account, which, following others, I call the "physical discursus":

2a5: We neither feel nor perceive any singular things except bodies and modes of thinking. See the postulates after 2p13.

On my view, this reference indicates that Spinoza takes the axioms and the discursus to be complementary. The discursus helps to explain why these truths about our experience hold, and the evident truths about experience offer support for the characterization of the human body in the discursus. A detailed account of the human body and human mind that Spinoza takes to explain our experience of the external world—and therefore to serve as a basis for his accounts to follow in *Ethics* 2 of the sorts of knowledge that our finite minds can have—emerges from this application of the axioms and the discursus to the metaphysics of singular things.

Following 2p10 and its corollary, which present the reasons that Spinoza has for denying that a human being is a substance, Spinoza sets out his basic positive account of the human mind (2p11–2p13c), on which it is the idea of the human body. At 2p11, he claims that the human mind is the idea of an actually existing singular thing. In the proposition's intricate demonstration Spinoza draws upon the metaphysical constraints produced by prior argument and, in a noticeable shift in the presentation of *Ethics* 2, incorporates his new axioms. First, he argues that we are ideas: by 2p10c, we must be modes; but, by 2a2, we think; therefore we are modes of thought, or, what is the same thing for Spinoza, ideas. Next, he argues that we are ideas of singular things that exist: ideas are always intentional by 2a3; by 2p8c, because we are talking about existing minds, their objects must exist; by 2a1 (which denies necessary existence to human beings), those objects must not be infinite but singular. Finally, a corollary to 2p11 restricts, not merely the idea's object, but the idea itself: the human mind is a finite mode of thought, so it is an idea in God only insofar as God is that mode; its knowledge of its object will therefore also be limited.

Despite this limitation, Spinoza proceeds to make a striking claim about the human mind's knowledge of its object:

2p12: Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived by the human mind, or there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the mind; that is, if the object of the idea constituting a human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived by the mind.

The proposition may seem quite permissive. To anticipate, the object of the idea that is the human mind is the human body. Even taking 2p11c's qualification into account and noting that my awareness of my body may be partial, it might still seem implausible to claim that I am aware of whatever occurs in my body: it is not merely that I do not have a fully veridical perception of chemical reactions currently occurring in my pancreas, it is that I have no perception of those reactions at all! At the same time, and perhaps more subtly, 2p12 hints at a severe, perhaps implausibly severe, limitation on human awareness. If my perception consists in being aware only of the body that is the intentional object of the idea that is my mind, then there are many things—things external to my body—that I may seem unable to know. If I am only ever aware of my body, how am I to perceive the external world?

Spinoza draws upon 2a4 and 2a5 in defending the claim (2p13) that the “human body, or a certain mode of extension that actually exists, and nothing else” is the object of the human mind. The claim that we feel affections of body, 2a4, shows that the human mind is of body. By 2a5, we feel no singular things other than “bodies and modes of thinking.” The axiom yields the “nothing else” at 2p13. The argument leads to something close to a definitive account of the human being: “From this it follows that man consists of a mind and a body, and that the human body exists, as we are aware of it” (2p13c).

The physical discursus, in the argument of *Ethics* 2, is a means of understanding the human mind: because the mind is the idea of the body, it stands to reason that one can better understand the idea in question by better understanding the body in question. The discursus also addresses a pressing issue raised by prior accounts of the metaphysics of modes. As we have seen, those passages assert that God has an idea of our body and that this idea, understood in a particular way, is the human mind. They also assert, however, that God has an idea of any body, any “mode of extension” in the

phrase of 2p7s. The phrase suggests—and Spinoza’s correspondence with Tschirnhaus in its references, generically, to the minds of singular things confirms—that there is an idea of any body that is the mind of that thing. In addition to contributing straightforwardly to an account of the human mind, then, an account of the human body stands to help us to distinguish human minds from the minds of other bodies, such as toasters, bears, rocks, and apples. A scholium to 2p13c, which introduces the discursus, emphasizes both of these purposes:

[N]o one will be able to understand [the human mind] adequately, *or* distinctly, unless he first knows adequately the nature of our body. For the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human body. And so, whatever we have said of the idea of the human body must also be said of the idea of any thing. (2p13cs)

Spinoza goes on to argue in the scholium that the human body “contains more reality” than other sorts of bodies in virtue of its greater capacity to do many things at once and to be acted on in many ways at once. Greater reality is a difficult notion to understand. God, for Spinoza as for Descartes (see Meditation 3), is the most real being, the cause of all things, and the most powerful thing. At 2d6 and 2d7, in introducing finite things, Spinoza associates degrees of reality with degrees of perfection and makes a finite thing (or a number of finite things) a singular thing to the extent that it has an effect. To be more real is, then, very similar to being more capable or more causally efficacious. Perhaps, if every instance of passivity is also in some degree an instance of activity, the capacity for being acted on by other things to which Spinoza refers at 2p13cs is a subtler, and inherently finite, form of such capability. The task of the discursus, so understood, is to explain the activity and capability of the human body and, in particular, the ways in which this activity and capability distinguish the human body from other bodies and so make it more powerful and more real. To do so will be to distinguish, at the same time, the human mind from the minds of these other bodies.

The discursus begins with an account of what all bodies share and therefore what is true even of the simplest bodies (2p13csa1–a2, G2/97.19–99.25). The most important of these claims for the argument of the *Ethics* that follows are the assertions that “all bodies either move or are at rest”

(2p13csa1) and that “each body moves now more slowly, now more quickly” (2p13csa2). Spinoza later refers to such properties as common properties and ideas of these properties as common notions (2p38), the foundation of one sort of adequate knowledge, reason (2p40s2).

From his account of simple bodies, Spinoza proceeds to an account of individuals. The second part of this definition of “individual” will apply to human bodies:

2p13csd: When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner [*ratione*], we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.

From this definition and Spinoza’s subsequent references to it (2p24dem, 4p39dem) we know that he takes a human body to be a composite individual whose parts communicate their motions to one another by a certain fixed manner. Such bodies, Spinoza argues in a series of Lemmata, can survive sorts of change that simple bodies cannot survive.

More, however, can be said about the human body. In a further step, Spinoza moves to an account of individuals that are themselves composed of composite individuals (rather than merely simple bodies); individuals composed of these; and, finally, to the whole of corporeal nature (2p13csl7s, G2/101.27–G2/102.3). He characterizes the human body as highly composite. It therefore belongs to the second of these classes of individuals, and it seems likely that he regards it as, among such individuals, highly complex. This is what distinguishes the human body from other bodies and, at the same time, the human mind from other minds, what Spinoza sets out to show prior to the discursus at 2p13cs (G2/97). Because there is a great range of complexity possible among bodies composed of composite bodies, Spinoza leaves room for a great variety of finite individuals that are less complex than human beings, such as (on his view) animals, as well as a great variety of finite individuals that are more complex than human beings. The theory also leaves conceptual space for similarly complex individuals that are not human beings.

A series of postulates at the end of the discursus describes the human body explicitly. Many of these postulates matter for accounts of the body’s causal activity and preservation to follow. Although 2p6dem restricts

conception of modes of one attribute through any other attribute, it is helpful to bear in mind, in assessing these postulates, that Spinoza introduces the discursus with the purpose of determining “the difference between the human mind and the others, and how it surpasses them” (G2/97.4–5). Because the mind and body are one and the same, we can know the mind’s complexity and capability by knowing the body’s. Notably, a point that Spinoza makes at 2p15, because modes of extension and modes of thought are one and the same and because the individuals that compose the body are modes of extension, we can know that the human mind is just as complex as the human body. It is composed of modes that are “one and the same” as the modes of the body and that, by 2p7, are in the same relations to one another.

For the account of the human cognition in *Ethics* 2, the most important postulate is the fifth, which introduces the structures by means of which the corporeal imagination has the capability of representing, and misrepresenting, the influence of external objects:

2p13cspost5: When a fluid part of the human body is determined by an external body so that it frequently thrusts against a soft part [of the body], it changes its surface and, as it were, impresses on [the soft part] certain traces of the external body striking against [the fluid part].

At 2p16 and its corollaries, Spinoza offers a general account of the causal interaction of bodies and, likewise, of minds, which helps to address the problem of our ability to know bodies other than our own. Each mode of any body, 1, that is partially caused by some external body, 2, involves the nature of body 2. The idea of body 1, then, while it has body 1 as its object most directly, also has body 2 as its object in this limited sense. External objects frequently have effects on the human body in virtue of their occurrent presence, as (to borrow an example from Kant) when a heavy ball resting on a cushion causes a depression in the cushion. In the human body this is a change to its softer surfaces and, in cases where such a change occurs, the mind regards the external object as present to it (2p17). Crucially, some changes might remain, even after the external object is gone, as a tired cushion might remain collapsed after a heavy ball is removed from it. This feature of the body, which Spinoza introduces at 2p17c, helps to explain error (2p17cs), memory, and related ideas of imagination (2p18, 2p18s). When, like the tired cushion, my body retains

the impression of an external object that is no longer there, I will continue to regard the external object as present to me.

Spinoza reserves the term “represent” (*repraesentare*) for the relation between the mind and external objects in ideas of this sort (see further uses at G2/82.2–5; G2/82.22–24; G2/122.1–5; and G2/160.7–10). This is a new, important variety of relation in the *Ethics*, which holds between an idea and, at least in typical cases, a body that is not one and the same as that idea. Spinoza calls ideas that represent external bodies in this way “ideas of imagination”:

Next, to retain the customary words, the affections of the human body whose ideas represent external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, though they do not reproduce the figures of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines. (2p17cs, translation modified)

A paradigm case of imagination, the notion of representation as present suggests, is sensation: while I see the sun, it has effects upon my body in virtue of which I take the sun to be present.

The class of ideas produced in us at least in part by the external world is, however, broad and varied. In a rich discussion, Spinoza goes on at 2p18 and a scholium to argue that it includes association, memory, and language. In association, for example, if an initial experience is of two objects together, then the objects have made a single impression on the soft surfaces of the human body. An imaginative thought that returns to the first, then, will also be an imaginative thought of the second because its impression accompanies the impression of the first. By invoking this sort of mechanism in the body, Spinoza attempts to explain the sequence or train of thoughts in the human mind when the mind does not proceed by the order of reasons. In accounts that follow, the class of imaginative ideas becomes still broader. Because, notably, passions are ideas of imagination, Spinoza’s account of imagination matters to the accounts of passion, bondage, and its amelioration that follow in later parts of the *Ethics*.

2.2.1 Is Spinoza’s Account of the Difference between Human Beings and Other Things Plausible?

Descartes makes us wholly different from other sorts of bodies and so exceptional. Spinoza does not. He distinguishes us from other finite things incrementally. On Spinoza’s account, human beings differ from other finite

things in our degree of reality, power, and complexity. This view, his incrementalism, makes his metaphysics of finite things, and his psychology especially, distinctive. Understanding its implications is a central task in the interpretation of *Ethics* 2–5.

The view, which Spinoza introduces most explicitly at 2p13s (G2/96–97), in a passage preceding the physical discursus, may be introduced by contrasting it against the view of Descartes. In the course of arguing to the conclusion that the human mind might be able to survive without the body in the *Meditations*, Descartes contends that the mind is really distinct from the body but that the mind and body are a substantial union. On the basis of these doctrines, Descartes finds that human beings differ in kind from other bodies in virtue of having a mind or soul. The view serves nicely to distinguish us from things that are very different from us, like shelves and rocks, but animals present a problem. Are animals' bodies so marvelously intricate that they act as if they have souls even though they do not? Or do they actually have souls as we do?

At 2p13 and its corollary, Spinoza offers a different account of the mind-body union: the human mind is the idea of an actually existing body, which is the human body. In a scholium, Spinoza acknowledges that, on his metaphysics, there is an idea of anything whatsoever, so that all individuals “though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate.” Whereas Descartes's account of the human being serves nicely to distinguish us from shelves and rocks but runs into difficulty with animals, this position, on which all things have minds, promises a plausible account of animals—they are like us and differ only in degree—but runs into difficulty with shelves and rocks. Spinoza appears to concede that even the simplest bodies have minds.

2.2.2 How Can an Idea Be Both a Concept and a Kind of Activity?

It can be attractive to understand the intricate metaphysics of finite modes of thought that Spinoza presents from 2p6–2p7s in conceptual terms. Notably, we can find something like the same order in ideas and things on such a view. Thus, a complete description of the action of a billiard cue, a first ball, a second ball, their surroundings, and the laws of nature might be thought to explain or imply a complete description of the subsequent motion of the second ball. Likewise, on this account, the moving cue

together with its context and the laws of nature causes the motion of the first ball, which, in turn, causes the motion of the second. This seems, in accordance with 2p7, to be something like one order, an order of explanation, that is the same as another, causal, order. Finally, in accordance with 2p6, it would clearly be a mistake to say that a complete description of the action of the cue causes the first ball to move and, likewise, to say that the motion of the cue implies or explains a complete description of the motion of the first ball.

Spinoza's emphasis on the formal reality of ideas hints at a complication for such a conceptualist interpretation. It suggests that ideas on Spinoza's account are at least two things, not one. Spinoza argues that the human mind is the idea of the human body (2p11) but also that the mind perceives its object and everything that happens in it (2p12). This entity, then, enters into causal relations on its own account and not merely insofar as its object does so. Notably, Spinoza builds a theory of imagination on the basis of this account of the mind-body relation. The human mind senses, imagines, and experiences passion. Concepts do not. In order to accommodate these further doctrines, a reader who favors a conceptualist interpretation of 2p6–2p7cs must at least supplement it. Perhaps it will have to be abandoned altogether.

In order to see the challenge that Spinoza's doctrine poses, consider, instead of a simple physical event, events that we might take to incorporate the causal nature of ideas considered as psychological states. First, as cause, Berger thinks about motorbikes and wants to record his notion; then he scribbles in his book. The scribbling is not an idea, but the volition is. By 2p6, then, we must attribute a cause of the scribbling under the attribute of extension. Perhaps this can work. The states of Berger's body that correlate in the order of body to Berger's volition in the order of thought cause the scribbling, and, because the order and connection of ideas is the same as this order and connection of things, Berger's volition has the effect of an idea of the scribbling, perhaps his conscious apprehension of his own activity. Next, as effect, Berger comes across a book and comes to have an idea of the book. The book is not an idea, but the idea of the book is. By 2p6, then, we must attribute a cause of the idea under the attribute of thought. In this case, the prospects for a plausible account are worse. What idea could plausibly cause this perception? God has an idea of the book. I suppose such a thing, considered as a concept, might imply any less

complete version of the same concept. It is hard to argue, however, that this is what causes Berger's perception. Rather, if we insist upon there being a sensory idea of the book that is produced, it seems that the book itself, the extended thing, is a principal cause of that idea.

The doctrine of 2p13 is central to the *Ethics*. It is not clear, though, that the doctrine is plausible or coherent. It may be an ambitious attempt to explain conceptual and psychological senses of "idea" at once. Or it may simply be a confusion. In my view, reconciling the metaphysics of ideas at 2p6–2p7cs with the psychological claims of 2p11–2p13 is the most difficult problem in the interpretation of the *Ethics*. Put broadly, how can a human mind be both the idea of the body and also a perceiving, acting thing?

2.2.3 Is Spinoza an Idealist?

On a naïve interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics, he espouses a form of mind-body dualism: at 2p7, he asserts a perfect isomorphism between the order of ideas and the order of bodies and admits no further orders. This interpretation is certainly wrong. Spinoza's God has infinite attributes (1d6), not just thought and extension. The correspondence with Tschirnhaus suggests, moreover, that 2p7 and 2p7s should be understood to convey a view on which there is an idea correlate to each mode of each attribute. Still further, because the order of things includes all things, it will include ideas themselves, such that there is an idea of every idea.

One might also read Spinoza as such a dualist, more plausibly, in a pragmatic way. On this interpretation, although there are many, many things—such as modes of attributes other than thought and extension—that we cannot know, everything that we can know is mind or body, and every singular thing that we can know that is a body is one and the same as an idea. While there are ideas of these ideas, we can mostly set these to one side. What distinguishes the idea of the idea of a camel from the idea of the idea of Paris is very like what distinguishes the idea of a camel from the idea of Paris.

Depending upon what one takes to justify the label, there are reasons to defend near-idealist, idealist, conceptualist, materialist, and non-idealist interpretations of Spinoza's metaphysics. This basic issue, which Yitzhak Melamed's work raises forcefully, remains open. In addressing it, understanding Spinoza's basic commitments, including the principle of

sufficient reason and the relations that characterize the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* 1 surely matter.

I myself prefer a non-idealist interpretation. The principal basis for this conviction is that, for Spinoza, while ideas vastly outnumber modes of any other attribute, the *number* of ideas does not deeply matter: as objects of modes of other attributes, ideas do little genuine explanatory work themselves. Although I face the problem of explaining claims in the *Ethics*—and particularly in *Ethics* 5—that attribute distinctive activity to minds, I think that, as the physical discursus does the explanatory and causal work in Spinoza's theory of the human mind, it is extension and, theoretically, other attributes that do the explanatory and causal work throughout Spinoza's accounts of nature.

2.3 Inadequate Knowledge of the Self and the External World: 2p19–2p36

The *Ethics* includes two related notions of inadequacy. An *inadequate cause* is a partial cause. For example, the human body is an inadequate cause of the image of the sun that arises in sensation because the sun also partially causes this image. Likewise, because there is a single causal order, the mind is an inadequate cause of its idea of imagination, the idea that has the corporeal image of the sun as its object. An *inadequate idea* is one that falls short of genuine knowledge. It is, to a degree, fragmentary or confused. The notions are related; on Spinoza's view, we are inadequate causes of our ideas whenever they are inadequate. Although Spinoza makes this association most explicit at the beginning of *Ethics* 3, and especially at 3p1 (see §3.1 below), the series of propositions following his first account of imagination in *Ethics* 2 prefigures it. In them, he moves from claims about which ideas are partially caused to conclusions about which ideas fall short of knowledge and, finally, to an initial account of error.

Propositions 19–23 concern ideas of the self, considered as a body and as a mind. On Spinoza's view, recall, the human mind is God's idea of the human body insofar as God constitutes a particular mode of thought or idea, a point that Spinoza makes most clearly at 2p11c. In this series of propositions, he argues on the basis of this understanding of the status of the human mind that a human mind will only know its own body insofar as it is affected by other bodies. This difficult phrase suggests that we know

ourselves only through our ideas of imagination, and Spinoza confirms this hint by referring to 2p17 in the demonstration to 2p19: we perceive particular existing bodies, whether our own or external bodies, only through imagination.

Spinoza argues at 2p20 that, just as the human mind is God's idea of the human body, understood in a certain qualified sense, so also there is a similarly qualified idea of that idea. More plainly, just as the mind knows the body in a certain way, so the mind knows itself in that way. Notably, just as the mind knows affections of the body and does not otherwise know the body by 2p19, so the mind knows ideas of those affections (2p22) and otherwise does not know itself (2p23). Thus, Spinoza's view suggests—although his emphasis, later in the *Ethics*, on self-knowledge as a good that we can attain may present reasons to qualify this conclusion—I am aware of my body (to a degree) and of the sun (to a degree) in viewing the sun; I am aware of this awareness; and I have no self-knowledge beyond the awareness of myself that I have in such ideas.

These characterizations of mind at 2p19 and 2p20 follow, in a way, from 2p7, which Spinoza cites in both demonstrations: by 2p7, there is an idea of the body correlate to the body in the order of ideas, and, because ideas are also things, there is also an idea correlate to the first idea. Human psychology, however, is prominent in these propositions where it is not prominent at 2p7. Although Spinoza writes about *cognitio*—knowledge or cognition or awareness—a great deal in the *Ethics*, many discussions prior to the formal introduction of the human mind at 2p11 do not characterize human knowledge, cognition, or awareness specifically. (Two axioms, 2a4 and 2a5, which Spinoza uses in describing the mind at 2p13, are an exception and offer some initial characterization of human experience.) At 2p19–2p20, Spinoza explains experience in terms of our relation to God. He takes the human mind's knowledge to be God's knowledge insofar as God is the idea of the human body. By this means, 2p19 and 2p20 introduce claims about our mental life: we know or cognize our own bodies in a limited way and, in a similarly limited way, we know our own minds.

Having introduced what we cognize, Spinoza can then evaluate that cognition: the propositions that follow shift to epistemological language. In them, Spinoza writes not about ideas that are affections with partial external causes but about inadequate ideas. As I have mentioned, Spinoza takes our inadequate ideas to be partially caused, and, of course, the preceding

propositions do concern what the mind does and does not know. The shift then may seem minor. It is significant, however, in that it concerns not merely the scope but now also the quality of human cognition. Thus, according to 2p19–2p23, I am not aware of some aspects of my body and my mind and I am aware of others, namely, those of which I am a partial cause. In arguing that those ideas that I do have in imagination are inadequate at 2p24–2p31, Spinoza goes further in suggesting that these ideas themselves are not genuine knowledge. This is clearest at 2p28, where Spinoza describes such cognition in familiar Cartesian terminology as “not clear and distinct, but confused.” Thus my knowledge of extension is confused in my awareness of the parts of my body (2p24); of my body itself (2p27) and its duration (2p30); of affections of my body (2p28); and of existing external bodies (2p25, 2p26) and their duration (2p31).

These points, which make my self-awareness confused, help to address the concern that 2p12 and 2p13 raise (see §2.2 above), on which the fact that the mind is the idea of the human body may seem to give Spinoza an implausibly strong account of our knowledge of what happens in our bodies. Similar points hold about our minds and the world: my knowledge of my own mind and external things in perception is likewise confused (2p29, 2p29c, 2p29cs).

Generally, Spinoza writes in a scholium to 2p29, “the mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused knowledge, of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of Nature, that is, so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things.” All imagination, by the definition at 2p17s, is a partial effect of external influence. What I experience is, of course, a function of my interactions with things around me. The order of such interactions—Spinoza’s common order of nature—is not the sort of order that might generate knowledge. In the scholium, Spinoza goes on to contrast such an order of ideas to an order in which a mind determines itself internally and compares things “to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions.” To anticipate, this is one of his characterizations of reason, which is a kind of genuine or adequate knowledge and is paradigmatically knowledge of the external world. It suggests that we can overcome the inadequate understanding of external things and ourselves, at least to a degree, by overcoming the order of inadequate causation that gives rise to imaginative ideas in ordinary experience and, somehow, giving

our corporeal affects and their correlate ideas a different, rational order. This is one of principal aims of *Ethics* 5.

Having characterized ideas of imagination in epistemological terms as inadequate or confused, Spinoza goes on to offer an account of falsity or error, which he presents as a privation of knowledge. He argues at 2p32 that “all ideas insofar as they are related to God, are true.” The demonstration, invoking 1a6, emphasizes a correspondence theory of truth: because all ideas, insofar as they are related to God, agree with their objects, all, with the same qualification, are true. Falsity and error, then, become features, not of ideas themselves (2p33) but of what ideas lack or have insofar as they are in particular finite minds (2p35).

Ideas that are adequate in a human mind are adequate in God insofar as God constitutes the essence of that mind (2p34), but an idea that is adequate in God insofar as God constitutes the essence of a given mind together with something external to it is inadequate in the finite mind (2p36). Error or falsity consists, then, in that element of the idea that is external to the mind. To return to the case of sensation, because my sensation—seeing the sun, for example—is well understood as including my body and the sun as partial causes, the adequate idea of the sensation, in God’s mind, will include my nature, the sun’s nature, and the image as its objects. (Indeed, it will include whatever is the total or adequate cause of the image.) Because, however, my mind is the idea of my body alone, my mind’s sensation will include only a radically incomplete impression of the sun.

Spinoza offers an example of error in the misperception of the sun at 2p35s:

When we look at the sun, we imagine it as about two hundred feet away from us, an error which does not consist simply in this imagining, but in the fact that while we imagine it in this way, we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagining. For even if we later come to know that it is more than six hundred diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun.

A fully adequate idea, the account suggests, must include knowledge of all of the idea’s causes. Any idea of sensation will, then, always be false in the sense that—even if I do have the knowledge in question in some other idea—the idea itself will still have a cause outside of me. Error in this sense can be harmless, if I act on the basis of my other, better idea of the sun’s

distance, for example, and not on the basis of my imaginative idea. The imaginative idea, however, is also not corrected by that other idea. Even when I know better, the sun still seems two hundred feet away.

2.3.1 How Can an Idea Be False?

Spinoza's account of the epistemology of imaginative ideas from 2p19–2p36 emphasizes partiality, confusion, and inadequacy, which he describes in phenomenal terms (in such ideas, a mind regards an external object as present) and causal terms (these ideas always have partial external causes). While it is clear that he regards such ideas as flawed in some way, the precise manner in which such ideas fall short of knowledge may not be clear. The final few propositions of this part of *Ethics* 2, which focus on falsity and error, therefore promise substantial contributions to Spinoza's epistemology. They present interpretative challenges of their own, however. The most pressing question is how ideas that are true insofar as they are related to God (2p33) and that have nothing positive in them on account of which they are called false (2p34) can nevertheless associate closely with falsity and error.

Two options—and these are perhaps not mutually exclusive—seem promising. First, we might understand error in terms of a person's activity rather than her idea. This view can accommodate 2p33 and 2p34 because, on it, ideas of imagination are not themselves erroneous; rather, they are ideas that cause the activity that amounts to error. Thus, for example, the imaginative idea of the sun that I have in sensation (or, more strictly, the correlate corporeal image that is its object) may cause me to say “the sun is about 200 feet away,” and it is the statement that is false and erroneous. Similarly (to anticipate *Ethics* 3 and 4 and because the passions are also ideas of imagination), the passionate desire that I have for chocolate may cause the error of eating too much chocolate. The equal footing on which this interpretation puts cognitive and practical error is, I think, one of its strengths because the *Ethics* consistently suggests that the two sorts of error are deeply of the same metaphysical sort.

A second option for interpreting Spinoza's view of error is to take it to be ideas of imagination themselves that are false and erroneous. Such a view may be understood in terms of the correspondence of true ideas with their objects, which Spinoza endorses at 1a6. On this view, at first glance,

we might simply sort true from false ideas by distinguishing those that agree with their objects from those that do not agree with their objects. All ideas of imagination, then, would be in the second category. For this view, accommodating 2p32 and 2p33 becomes more difficult. By 2p32, there is some sense in which *all* ideas, including ideas of imagination, are true. If ideas of imagination are all false, then, they must all be true in one sense and all false in another. Perhaps, as Michael Della Rocca has suggested, because a given idea can be in a finite mind and in God at once, it can have different characteristics relative to different contexts.

2.3.2 Which Minds and Which Ideas Are Conscious?

Spinoza's account of mind has several features that may seem to call for a theory of selective consciousness, that is, a theory of which minds among different sorts of minds are conscious and, in those minds that are conscious, of which ideas are conscious. To begin with the first issue, Spinoza's incrementalism (on which everything that he has shown to be true about the human mind is true of other individuals though in different degrees; see §2.2.1 above) might seem to call for an account of which minds are conscious and which are not. On that view, because human minds are conscious, minds that differ from ours only in being more or less powerful or complex will be conscious as well, though in different degrees. The question becomes more pressing when one notices that, by 2p11, to be a mind is little more than to be an idea of an actually existing thing. That suggests that all actually existing things—all dolphins but also all shelves and peas and fossils—have minds. Incrementalism may suggest, then, not merely that dolphins and pigs are conscious, but that shelves and peas are. In order to show that Spinoza does not commit to such a view, if we believe that he does not, we would need to be able to show why it is that some minds are conscious but others are not.

Turning to the question of which ideas within a given mind are conscious, the 2p12 position, on which there is an idea in the human mind of whatever happens in its object, may seem to imply, implausibly, that we are aware of everything that happens in our bodies. A theory on which, although we have ideas of everything that happens in our bodies we are nevertheless not conscious in all of these ideas, might make the view seem more plausible. Very generally, we might insist that a genuine theory of

mind distinguish between what is conscious and what is unconscious in a given mind.

Spinoza offers some resources in *Ethics* 2 for addressing these issues. His theory of imagination, and in particular the phrase “regard as present,” might be most naturally understood to refer to conscious experience, and similar claims might be made about 2a4 and 2a5. One might also take his claims about ideas of ideas to be a theory of apperception. The principal challenge for a reader who wants to find a theory of selective consciousness in the *Ethics* is to find in these resources a way of distinguishing human minds from other minds. Looking forward to Spinoza’s ethical theory, a further challenge is to distinguish among more and less conscious human minds.

2.3.3 How Does the Common Order of Nature Relate to Other Orders?

In my discussions of Spinoza’s metaphysics, I have emphasized two causal orders, suggesting that God is the cause of the essence of finite things directly but the cause of their existence indirectly, by means of other finite things. Spinoza’s discussions of definition, together with 1p17s2, and 1p25 are the principal sources for this view (see §1.1.1 and §1.2.5). With Spinoza’s account of imagination, the *Ethics* emphasizes a third causal order, the “common order of nature” (2p29c) in which the mind’s encounters with external things are “fortuitous” (*fortuito*, 2p29c) and its experience random (*experientia vaga*, 2p40s2).

It may be unclear what this order is or how it relates to the other orders. Terms such as “fortuitous” and “random” are particularly challenging for readers given Spinoza’s necessitarianism. Nevertheless understanding these claims is a key to understanding the rest of the *Ethics*. The order of human experience is a foundational feature of Spinoza’s accounts of error (2p29c, 2p29cs, 2p30), and, in particular, the human bondage to passion (4p4c, 4p57, 4app7). A central part of Spinoza’s strategy for mitigating bondage in *Ethics* 5 is a response to this problematic random order of nature. It is to act on those of our affects that are “uncertain and random” (5p10s) in such a way as to connect the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect (5p10) (see §5.2 below).

An interpretation of the random order of experience should, I think, appeal to Spinoza's metaphysics. As we will see (§2.4), Spinoza suggests in his epistemology that there are two kinds of genuine knowledge, which resemble in some respects the two causal orders of his metaphysics. A deep understanding of that part of our cognition that falls short of genuine knowledge, that is, of ideas of imagination, will incorporate an account of the ways in which this order of experience is a product of causal interactions among finite things.

2.4 Genuine Knowledge: 2p37–2p49s

Some of the propositions in which Spinoza describes ideas of imagination may seem to limit human knowledge severely. For example, we have seen that 2p19 limits our knowledge of our own bodies: “The human mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected.” When the mind imagines, it does so from a “common order of nature,” presumably the order in which we interact with and are aware of external things. In such ideas, because the mind is passive, it never gains adequate knowledge of external things. Spinoza's language at 2p19—“by which the body is affected”—may suggest that this is the situation for all of those ideas in which we are aware of ourselves or, as external causes of those affections, existing things in the world.

The corollary and scholium to 2p29, however, offer some hope. Spinoza suggests in the scholium that a mind may be disposed to consider things internally and regard “their agreements, differences, and oppositions” (2p29s). If one might have ideas of oneself and the external world other than ideas of imagination, then perhaps some adequate knowledge of them is possible after all.

At the end of *Ethics* 2, Spinoza does introduce two further kinds of ideas, ideas of reason and ideas of intuition, and he makes several strong claims about what we know and how we know it. He argues that both sorts of ideas are always adequate; that is, both constitute genuine knowledge. There is reason, moreover, to think that ideas of reason are something like the disposition that Spinoza describes at 2p29s. These different kinds of cognition offer some promise of adequate knowledge for finite minds.

Earlier, at lemma 2 of the physical discursus (see §2.2 above), Spinoza emphasizes the point that there are some properties—notably, the property of being at motion or at rest and moving now more slowly and now more quickly—that are common to all extended singular things. The account of ideas of reason in the *Ethics* begins with the claim at 2p37 that such a property cannot constitute the essence of any singular thing. Because Spinoza will later make some claims (notably, at 2p47s and 5p28) that suggest that there is some connection between knowledge of such properties and knowledge of these essences, 2p37 is difficult. Read literally, in any case, it suggests that a human mind cannot attain fully adequate knowledge of its body or of any other singular thing in knowledge of common properties. Spinoza goes on to argue that a mind can, nevertheless, conceive these properties themselves adequately. Indeed, he maintains, it always does so. By this means human minds have at least some knowledge of the external world.

Spinoza defends this view in demonstrations to 2p38 and 2p39. While 2p38 is more important to the arguments of the *Ethics* because it concerns properties common to all bodies, the ideas of which are common notions, 2p39's demonstration is clearer and more comprehensive:

2p39dem: Let A be that which is common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies, which is equally in the human body and in the same external bodies, and finally, which is equally in the part of each external body and in the whole. There will be an adequate idea of A in God (by 2p7c), both insofar as he has the idea of the human body, and insofar as he has ideas of the posited external bodies. Let it be posited now that the human body is affected by an external body through what it has in common with it, that is, by A; the idea of this affection will involve property A (by 2p16), and so (by 2p7c) the idea of this affection, insofar as it involves property A, will be adequate in God insofar as he is affected with the idea of the human body, that is (by 2p13), insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind. And so (by 2p11c), this idea is also adequate in the human mind.

To return to the example of a sensory experience of the sun, Spinoza invites us here to consider a property common to a human body and the sun. Lemma 2 offers the clearest example of such a property, so let us say that both the human body and its parts and the sun and its parts are either at motion or at rest. Spinoza argues that because this property is in the human body in this way, the idea of it is adequate in God insofar as God constitutes the nature of the human mind. As we have seen, the imaginative idea that the human mind has of the singular thing, the sun, in experiencing it will be inadequate because the idea includes only a fragmentary and not an

adequate idea of the sun. On 2p39dem, however, the human mind may nevertheless know this property of the sun adequately because it, at least, is not fragmentary in the idea. Thus, or so Spinoza concludes, the mind will therefore have an adequate idea in its sensory idea of the sun: an idea of the sun's property of being either at motion or at rest.

While Spinoza does not use 2p39 in the *Ethics* and does not name properties that are common to the human body and only some external bodies, he does at 2p38 make a similar argument concerning common properties, properties that he does name and that he takes to be equally in the part and in the whole of all bodies whatever. Such properties will always and for any two bodies meet the description of property A at 2p39dem. Therefore, a human mind—indeed, any mind—will perceive such properties adequately both insofar as it perceives “itself and insofar as perceives its own or any external body” (2p38dem). That is, in perception, to this extent at least, we have adequate knowledge of ourselves and the external world. Perhaps, 2p39 suggests, we can have more such knowledge to the extent that we have properties in common with some but not other bodies. We can, moreover, build upon this knowledge, Spinoza suggests at 2p40, and perhaps it is this knowledge, knowledge that “follows in the mind from ideas that are adequate in the mind,” that most closely fits our ordinary understanding of reason.

The scholia to 2p40 offer a summary of Spinoza's accounts of ideas. The first contrasts the common notions and highly confused universal ideas. The second includes a catalog of the different kinds of cognition or knowledge. In addition to imagination, Spinoza lists reason, citing 2p38c, 2p39, 2p39c, and 2p40. Then, surprisingly, Spinoza lists a third kind of knowledge, which he has not mentioned before: intuitive knowledge is knowledge that “proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.”

This definition is puzzling. First, Spinoza has not offered any account of how we can gain adequate knowledge of the essence of a thing. Indeed, as we have seen, 2p37 seems explicitly to warn against the possibility of using reason to gain such knowledge, and the inadequacy of ideas of imagination is guaranteed by the promise that essences of things are not known in them. Second, as Don Garrett notes, the definition refers to the “essence of attributes,” but attributes (1d4) just are essences after a fashion. Spinoza, then, is asking us to proceed from an adequate idea of the essence of an

essence of God to an adequate idea of something that he has suggested is difficult ever to know, the essence of a thing—a difficult request to understand.

While interpretation of the third kind of knowledge is challenging, the three kinds of cognition may nevertheless be distinguished by their objects and epistemological status. Ideas of imagination are typically ideas of singular things and are always inadequate. Ideas of reason are ideas of properties and are adequate. Finally, intuitive knowledge consists of ideas of singular things and is adequate.

Once again, the two kinds of causal order that are prominent from 1p19–1p28 may matter to Spinoza’s different kinds of knowledge. First, ideas of imagination and reason, or at least the common notions, alike arise as a result of the body’s interaction with things. This is the causal order through which God, insofar as God’s power is expressed in an infinite order of finite things, as described at 1p28, causes the existence of other finite things. Perhaps in our position within that order, as it were, from the inside, this is also what Spinoza calls the random order of experience. God also causes singular things by causing their essence, however, and in intuitive knowledge it is this order, the finite order of the infinite, that Spinoza appears to invoke. Some evidence that Spinoza has these two orders in view in discussing the three kinds of knowledge is that he uses a similar, and similarly curious, phrase at 1p28 to the phrase “essence of attribute” that he uses in defining intuitive knowledge. At 1p28, recall (§1.3.2), Spinoza denies that the “absolute nature of an attribute” produces finite and determinate things. The use suggests that the essences of things, by contrast, may indeed follow from the “absolute nature of an attribute” in the other causal order, that is, the order that we grasp in knowledge by intuition (see §1.1.1, §1.2.5 and §2.3.3). Spinoza’s epistemology, then, reflects his metaphysics: the two ways that we can have genuine knowledge reflect the two ways in which God’s causal power works.

Having distinguished imagination from genuine knowledge, Spinoza goes on to characterize genuine knowledge further. Of course, there is a great deal that one might say about human knowledge. Among all that Spinoza might discuss, he argues that imagination is the only cause of falsity (2p41); that we can distinguish the true from the false by means of knowledge and so always know when we have a true idea (2p42–2p43); that, in reason, we always regard things as necessary (2p44); that each idea,

and therefore also the human mind, has an adequate understanding of God's essence (2p45–2p47); and that human will is well-understood as a component of an idea and not as a free faculty of mind (2p48–2p49).

In trying to understand why he discusses these issues among all of those that he might discuss, it may help to re-emphasize the preface to *Ethics* 2, which gives readers a reason to think that the topics that Spinoza chooses to discuss reflect his judgment about what is important to blessedness. While this explanation is incomplete—whatever their relation to blessedness, these topics clearly hold independent interest—I find that taking the preface at its word yields the best unified account of Spinoza's choice of topics in these propositions. In introducing them here, then, I will emphasize their importance for accounts of the mind and its blessedness that follow them in the *Ethics*.

The propositions that follow Spinoza's catalog of ideas, 2p41–2p43, concern truth. Spinoza asserts at 2p41 that ideas of reason and intuition are always true, which is not surprising. The characterization there of ideas of imagination, however, is somewhat new and interesting: Spinoza writes: "knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity." Earlier discussions of error and falsity as privation (2p17s, 2p35, 2p35s) might be read to suggest that all ideas of imagination simply *are* false in the relevant sense. As I have mentioned (§2.3.1), this different phrase potentially complicates the account. The latter two propositions concern our knowledge of the truth. Spinoza argues, at 2p42, that we can distinguish the truth by means of reason and intuition and, at 2p43, that we know that we have a true idea whenever we have one, a doctrine that he takes to depend on his account of ideas of ideas at 2p20 and that simplifies his intellectualist ethics, where he cites 2p43 frequently. Knowledge holds intrinsic and high value for Spinoza (see 4p26–4p28, 4app4, or §4.2 below), so it is extremely useful for us to know when we know.

At 2p44 and its corollaries and scholium, Spinoza distinguishes reason from imagination in another way: the mind regards things as necessary in ideas of reason, and only regards things as contingent in ideas of imagination. The point about reason follows, Spinoza argues in the demonstration to 2p44, from the facts that ideas of reason are true and that all things are necessary. In order to regard things in a way that is true, then, the mind will have to regard them as necessary. One might, however, say something more about the necessity of some ideas of reason. The common

notions are true of all things at all times. They are evident, then, in a way that other necessary truths are not, a point that will matter at 2p46 and 2p47.

The account of contingency in the *Ethics* builds upon the associative principle of 2p18. On that principle, recall, the imaginative experience of two objects, **A** and **B**, together gives a mind a tendency to recall **A** whenever it happens to consider **B** again. At 2p44s, Spinoza invites readers to consider what happens if a mind subsequently should experience **B** again, now with **C**. By the associative mechanism, the mind will now have a tendency to think of **A** whenever it encounters **B**, but it will also have a different tendency to think of **C**. The result of these two tendencies, Spinoza argues, will be a vacillation of mind in which the mind considers **A** and **C** alternately. This is what Spinoza takes it to be to regard things as contingent.

In Spinoza's ethical theory, both the account of reason and the account of imagination figure prominently. To anticipate, the perception of things as necessary grounds many propositions in which the rational thing to do is to be impartial about goods with respect to time (4p65–4p66). Because passions are ideas of imagination, the theory of vacillation and contingency contributes to Spinoza's accounts of the harms of indecisiveness and fickle desire (3p59s).

From 2p45–2p47 Spinoza defends robust claims about our knowledge of God's essence. At the demonstration to 2p46, he argues that what yields this knowledge is a common property of bodies and so a common notion. It appears, then, that he takes such knowledge to be an idea of reason. The doctrine is, however, clearly associated with the third kind of knowledge as well. Spinoza argues that because we all have an adequate knowledge of God's essence we also have a basis from which "we can deduce . . . a great many things which we know adequately and so can form [the] third kind of knowledge . . ." (2p47s).

How such deductions might work, and how they would amount to intuition, remains unexplained. Spinoza invokes 1a4 at 2p45, the proposition that the idea of any singular thing necessarily involves the essence of God. Supposing the essence of a singular thing to be an effect of the essence of God, that axiom might support a view on which, if a mind knows adequately the essence of a singular thing, then it will also know adequately the essence of God. After all, by 1a4, such knowledge involves knowledge of the essence of God. However, what Spinoza needs in order to

show that, given the knowledge of the essence of God, we can know singular things in the third kind of knowledge is different from this. It is the converse. Spinoza's various reservations about our knowledge of singular things work against the possibility of this sort of inference, and his assertion that we know God's essence does not mitigate the problem. Despite these difficulties, intuitive knowledge becomes increasingly prominent in Spinoza's ethical theory and eschatology, where Spinoza regards knowledge of the third kind as the most valuable sort of knowledge (see 5p24–5p33 or §5.4 below).

Spinoza addresses human will in the final propositions of *Ethics* 2. He argues that the human mind has no free will at 2p48, and, at 2p49, that affirmation and negation are features of ideas themselves. The propositions clearly address Cartesian views. Most famously in Meditation 4, Descartes maintains that we have a will, that it is free, and that we use the will in assenting to, or dissenting from, what is understood by a mental faculty different from will, namely, intellect. Thus, as Spinoza notes (G2/132–133), a Cartesian might maintain that I could understand what a winged horse is, or have an idea of a winged horse, without also assenting to it or believing that there is a winged horse. Spinoza, however, denies “that a man affirms nothing insofar as he perceives. For what is perceiving a winged horse other than affirming wings of a horse?” (G2/134).

This discussion emphasizes yet another important and undefined relation in the *Ethics*: A affirms (*affirmat*) B. While the term has many informal uses in the *Ethics*, Spinoza invokes affirmation in formal contexts increasingly in from the end of *Ethics* 2. For example, he argues that a definition of thing affirms the thing's essence at 3p4dem, and, in the General Definition of the Affects at the end of *Ethics* 3, he writes that, in a passion, a mind affirms of its body a greater or lesser force of existing.

As the General Definition may suggest, these propositions also serve as an account of belief and its change in the human mind that matters to the analyses of passion, bondage, and its mitigation to follow. Because we are not free to have or not to have the ideas that we have, including the passions that we have, the task of mitigating harmful ideas requires us to understand and to manipulate the causal processes that give rise to them. It stands to reason, also, that, lacking the freedom to feel or to think at will, our power to improve our situations is limited. While the criticism of Descartes's conception of will is certainly relevant to the accounts of cognitive error in

Ethics 2, then, it also forms a theme of Spinoza's discussion of the mitigation of bondage at 5 Preface (see §5.1).

2.4.1 What Are the Common Notions?

The common notions form an essential part of Spinoza's epistemology. It is in them that we know external things (2p38c) and the essence of God (2p46). They also supply the principal notion of reason in Spinoza's ethics. Spinoza's demonstration of his account of the essence of the human mind (3p3dem) cites 2p38c, and 3p3 in turn is the basis for most of Spinoza's claims about reason in ethics. In addition, it is by means of common notions that reason can contribute to the mitigation of passion in the opening propositions of *Ethics* 5 (especially 5p4 and 5p7). In the TTP, Spinoza makes common notions a basis for agreement among different people in a common knowledge and love of God (G3/61.28–31; G3/99.8–12; G3/179.26–35). Despite their importance to all of these aspects of Spinoza's philosophy, however, critics vary widely in their accounts of what precisely the common notions are.

Here are three interrelated questions that may matter to understanding Spinoza's view. First, which ideas are common notions? As I present them above (§2.4), only the ideas that Spinoza describes at 2p38 and calls "common notions" in its corollary are common notions. This is a controversial use, but I think that this is the correct view. Spinoza's references to ideas of what is common in formal parts of the *Ethics* (2p44c2dem, 5p4dem, 5p7dem) do not refer to ideas outside of 2p38. In addition, his use of the common notions in *Ethics* 5 requires such notions to be knowledge that is occurrent in all experience, a requirement that neither Spinoza's axioms nor the ideas of 2p39 and 2p40 can meet. Nevertheless, this view is controversial. The importance of the common notions as sources of knowledge of the external world and knowledge that different human minds share has moved different commentators to take the ideas of 2p39 or, following Descartes (see *Principles* 1.49–1.50 and the Second Replies AT 7 164–166), all axiomatic or self-evident truths to be common notions.

A second, related question is: are the common notions known, or perhaps merely available to be known? The issue is related because Spinoza clearly does not take the generalities of 2p40, the ideas of what some but

not all bodies have in common of 2p39, or his axioms to be known to all. He does insist that the ideas of 2p38 “must be perceived adequately, *or* clearly and distinctly, by all,” but the emphasis on experience at 2p38 and 2p39 suggests that this means that, for example, whenever any mind perceives the sun, it knows in that perception that the sun is either at motion or at rest. It is nevertheless not the case that all of us have each such occurrent experience.

The adjudication of this issue affects how one understands the mitigation of passion in *Ethics* 5 and perhaps also the relation between philosophy and religion in the TTP. As I understand the conflict between the common notions and the passions in human minds, when I act against the influence of the common notions, my action is always akratic; that is, I know what reason requires me to do and I do otherwise (see §4.2 and §4.2.1). Critics who take human beings not always to have occurrent knowledge in the common notions may take me instead to lack or to be inattentive to reason in such behavior.

A third question concerns the place of the common notions among ideas of reason: how do the common notions give rise to the sorts of truths—truths that are more familiar to us as rules of reason—that Spinoza refers to at 2p40 and its scholia? At 2p38dem, Spinoza suggests that I will always know in an idea of imagination that the external object of my idea is either at motion or at rest. Presumably, one of the truths that Spinoza refers to at 2p40 and its scholia, then, is something like Lemma 2 itself: from my body’s continuous agreement with other bodies in certain ways, I conclude that “all bodies agree in certain things.” How, though, do I reach that conclusion? Perhaps one might take Spinoza to suggest that in such reasoning we proceed by induction: an exceptionless but finite number of experiences of agreement between my body and other bodies leads me to conclude that all bodies share the relevant property. Perhaps the 2p40 ideas are innate in us. Perhaps, relatedly, they are truths that we must assume in understanding ourselves to experience a body. Commentators have defended versions of each of these views, but each option presents its own puzzles.

2.4.2 How Can a Human Mind Acquire Intuitive Knowledge?

Intuitive knowledge or knowledge of the third kind is “knowledge that proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (2p40s2). The knowledge is important to Spinoza’s ethics and eschatology because it is better than the second kind of knowledge (5p25–5p27, 5p36s, see §5.4 below). Some of Spinoza’s remarks about the common notions suggest, however, that it may be difficult for us to attain intuitive knowledge.

The puzzle arises from different conclusions about the two essences that intuitive knowledge involves. Spinoza suggests at 2p45–2p47 that any knowledge by intuition that we might acquire will have a basis in the common notions. For example, at 2p46dem, which depends upon 2p38, Spinoza presents the knowledge of God’s essence, the starting point in any intuitive knowledge, as a common notion. While the common notions guarantee human knowledge of God’s essence, however, they equally put knowledge of the essences of singular things beyond our reach. At 2p37, Spinoza argues that what is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole—this is the same account he gives of the common properties that are the object of common notions at 2p38—does not constitute the essence of any singular thing. To gain intuitive knowledge, we need both *relata*, God’s essence and the essence of a singular thing.

One open question is the extent to which 2p37 rules out our knowledge of the essences of singular things. The proposition *may* mean that the essence of a singular thing includes common properties but cannot include only common properties. This interpretation gains some plausibility because it makes sense of 2p37: if two singular things, A and B, had essences that included only properties in common then—perhaps with a few further assumptions about indiscernibles—one could conceive A’s essence without necessarily conceiving A (because one could conceive B) and, similarly A’s essence could exist without A if B existed. Spinoza makes something like this point at 2p37dem. This view also *may* allow us to gain intuitive knowledge incrementally: in knowledge of some of a thing’s essence, I might be said to know that essence to a degree. Perhaps, by the sorts of properties Spinoza refers to at 2p39, I could even gain further knowledge of this sort. I simply could never have a fully adequate idea of a singular thing’s essence by means of ideas of properties that my body has in common with other bodies.

Alternatively, if “constitute” and “pertain” at 2p37 and its demonstration mean that no common properties contribute to any singular thing’s essence, then 2p37 may block even such incremental intuitive knowledge. As Don Garrett notes, much of Spinoza’s use suggests that no properties, common or otherwise, belong to essences. Instead, properties follow from essences (TIE §§95–96, 2p16dem). If knowledge of a thing’s properties does not include any knowledge of a thing’s essence, then 2p37 is well understood to suggest that we can have no knowledge at all of the essence of a singular thing in our common notions.

Spinoza does assert that we can gain the third kind of knowledge (2p47s). If he maintains that we cannot understand a route to such knowledge in what we come to know of the external world in ideas of reason, then he must understand the process by which we come to the third kind of knowledge in a different way. A principal challenge facing any proposal about how we might do this—by means of some kind of pure inference, perhaps, or by coming to understand our innate ideas—is the characterization of such knowledge as the knowledge of singular things, which are particular existents in the world. It is hard to understand how we could come to have any knowledge of such things outside of experience altogether, and the only knowledge that we gain in experience, on the account of the *Ethics*, is in ideas of reason.

2.4.3 How Is Spinoza’s Account of Error a Departure from Cartesian Doctrine?

Ethics 2 ends with a rejection of the Cartesian view that the human mind has absolute or free will (2p48); the assertion that volition in the human mind is nothing “except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea” (2p49); and the conclusion that “will and intellect are one and the same” (2p49c). These passages show clearly that Spinoza rejects Descartes’s account of mental faculties.

Nevertheless, Spinoza’s views about how we can go about avoiding error and attaining knowledge resemble Descartes’s. The sun example, and the analysis of it, arises in similar form in Descartes’s *Meditations* (AT 7.39). Spinoza inherits Cartesian concerns about experience, which both take to be a principal and dangerous source of error. In his account of

adequacy, Spinoza endorses a version of the Cartesian theory of clear and distinct ideas.

The extent to which Spinoza adopts, adapts, or rejects particular Cartesian theses about error is an open interpretative issue. It is also a pressing issue because Spinoza makes passion a kind of idea of imagination, and central accounts of passion such as 3p11s and 3 General Definition of the Affects refer back to the account of imagination at 2p16–2p18. Such passages suggest that Spinoza will understand practical error and the avoidance of practical error in terms that are similar to those in which we understand error in sensation and its avoidance. Knowledge, moreover, will have inherent and high moral value for Spinoza (see, especially, 4p26–4p28 and 4 App 4).

Spinoza's identification of will and intellect suggests that ideas, including passions, just are beliefs and actions that are not distinct from the understanding that we have in them. What Spinoza requires in giving an account of the human mind's power is a way to explain the activity of an individual human mind such that it can—lacking the capacity, which Descartes asserts in some form and Spinoza rejects, to assent to one idea or the other—make better ideas in the mind more powerful. Understanding how Spinoza can meet this challenge is a major step toward understanding his epistemology and, as the reappearance of the sun example after the definitions of “good” and “evil” (4p1s) shows (see §4.1), his moral theory.

Recommended Reading

- Della Rocca, Michael. 1996. *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Seminal account of central issues in *Ethics* 2. See especially [Chapter 4](#)'s account of the mind-relativity of ideas.)
- Garrett, Don. 2010. “Spinoza's Theory of Scientia Intuitiva.” In *Scientia in Early Modern Philosophy: Seventeenth-Century Thinkers on Demonstrative Knowledge from First Principles*, edited by Tom Sorell, G. A. J. Rogers, and Jill Kraye, 99–115. Dordrecht: Springer. (A masterful account of Spinoza's difficult theory of the third kind of knowledge. Reprinted in *Nature and Necessity*.)
- Hegel, G. W. F. 2006–2009. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Edited by R. F. Brown. Translated by J. M. Stewart and R. F. Brown. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Volume 3 is the source of an interpretation of Spinoza influential, particularly, in the tradition of German Idealism.)
- Hübner, Karolina. 2021. “Spinoza on the Limits of Explanation.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 103 (2): 341–358. (Powerful challenge to traditional interpretations of causal and conceptual barrier.)

- LeBuffe, Michael. 2010. "Theories about Consciousness in Spinoza's *Ethics*." *The Philosophical Review* 119 (4): 531–563. (My interpretation of Spinoza's remarks about consciousness, including a discussion of recent efforts to find a theory of selective consciousness in the *Ethics*.)
- Melamed, Yitzhak. 2013. *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press. (A groundbreaking study. The account of 2p7 and related passages considerably advances scholarly debate.)
- Peterman, Alison. 2017. "The 'Physical' Interlude." In *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, edited by Yitzhak Melamed, 102–120. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (A helpful recent study of the discursus following 2p13.)
- Primus, Kristin. 2017. "Scientia Intuitiva in the *Ethics*." In *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, edited by Yitzhak Melamed, 169–186. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Thoughtful recent account of intuitive knowledge.)
- Renz, Ursula. 2018. *The Explainability of Experience: Realism and Subjectivity in Spinoza's Theory of the Human Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Influential interpretation of Spinoza's views of experience. See especially Chapter 14 on the common notions and knowledge.)
- Wilson, Margaret. 1996. "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge." In *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, edited by Don Garrett, 89–141. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Careful, influential study of central themes in Spinoza's epistemology.)

Spinoza in Literature

- Berger, John. 2015. *Bento's Sketchbook*. London: Verso.
- Maugham, Somerset. 2015. *Of Human Bondage*. New York. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. 1961. *The Spinoza of Market Street*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.

3

Striving, Joy, and Sadness

In *Ethics* 3, “On the Origin and Nature of the Affects,” Spinoza characterizes human behavior in terms of the striving (*conatus*) to persevere in being. Any singular thing, he argues, strives to persevere in being (3p6); its essence is this striving (3p7); and its causal activity, both as a total and as a partial cause, is explicable in terms of its striving (3p9). In more familiar experiential terms, human desire (*cupiditas*) is striving itself (3p9s), and joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*) are changes in the power of striving (3p11s). *Ethics* 3, then, is a characterization of what we might call human desire and emotion, which Spinoza grounds in an account of the essences of singular things. Looking back at *Ethics* 2 in the order of argument, the theory of striving offers a focused account of human nature, which, in its interaction with the natures of external things, explains a class of ideas of imagination of special concern: the passions and passionate desire. Looking forward, striving offers a basis in human nature for accounts in *Ethics* 4 and 5 of human bondage, its mitigation, good, evil, and the value of particular ends.

The doctrine that things and people may be characterized by some kind of fundamental striving is very old. Indeed it was already old in the first century B.C.E. when Cicero discussed a Stoic version:

As other natural things are produced, grow, and are sustained by their own seeds, so the nature of the world has all of those voluntary motions, both strivings and appetites, which the Greeks call *hormae*, and acts in accordance with them, just as we ourselves do, who are set in motion by feelings and sensations. (*On the Nature of the Gods* II.22, my translation)

The doctrine is also varied. Among sources that may have influenced Spinoza directly, Descartes makes striving the component of a given motion that belongs properly to a thing. For example, he argues that a stone strives to do what it would have done if a sling had not restrained it:

[I]f the stone were to leave the sling at the exact moment when it arrived from L at point A, it would in fact go from A towards C [that is, it will proceed on the tangent from A], not towards B [that is, it would not continue in circular motion]; and although the sling may prevent this outcome, it does not prevent the “striving.” (*Principles* 3.57; cf. DPP 17 for Spinoza’s account of Descartes’s view)

Hobbes uses “striving” in his physics, where it refers to motion through a point: “Striving is motion in less space and time than can be given (that is, determined or marked by a description or number); that is, it is motion through a point” (*De Corpore* 15.2, my translation). He also uses a notion of striving specific to animal motion, which complements the initial notion with an account of the tendency or, perhaps, goal of animal striving, preservation: “[I]f vital motion is fostered by the motion from sensation, the parts of organ will be disposed toward guiding the spirits in such a way that the motion can be preserved and increased by the help of the nerves. And so this, in animal motion, is the first striving” (*De Corpore* 25.12, my translation). Spinoza’s view resembles each of these views in some respects.

The term “striving” (“*conatus*”) is particularly useful, rhetorically, for Spinoza because—and this richness of meaning is evident already in some of these precedents—it suggests both a kind of tendency that is characteristic of all things and also, more specifically, human desire. The related philosophical task that Spinoza sets himself in *Ethics* 3 is to produce a detailed account of the way in which striving can be both at once. Spinoza begins, 3 Preface–3p3, by offering general accounts of action and passion, which may already be familiar from the theory of ideas in *Ethics* 2: we—and all singular things—are active whenever we are the total cause of what we do and passive whenever we are a mere partial cause of what we do. The doctrine of striving, 3p4–3p10, supplements this theory of action by describing what we do insofar as we act. Whenever we are the total cause of what we do, we persevere in being. Whenever we are a mere partial cause of what we do, then, just as Descartes’s rock would have gone to C had the sling not altered its motion, so we would have persevered in being had the external influence not altered our motion. The discussion culminates in a characterization of striving in human beings as desire and an initial account of the good, on which we judge something to be good because we desire it (3p9s).

From 3p11–3p50, Spinoza develops a theory of human desire and passions that emphasizes their objects. Two principal theses of this

discussion are the view, at 3p27, that, if we imagine a thing like us to experience some passion, we ourselves experience the same passion and the view, at 3p28, that we strive to bring about whatever we imagine will lead to joy and to avert whatever we imagine will lead to sadness. In the final propositions of *Ethics* 3, 3p51–3p59, Spinoza describes affections of central importance to his theology, ethics, and eschatology—wonder, self-esteem, and active forms of desire and joy—and he defends a general account of human passion that emphasizes the particularity of the causal circumstances in which passions arise.

This chapter includes sections on each of these groups of propositions. *Ethics* 3 also includes an appendix, which offers definitions of the affects and which may be usefully compared to similar lists of definitions in Descartes's *Passions of the Soul* and [Hobbes's *Leviathan*](#), Chapter 6. I will refer to this appendix below where what Spinoza writes there contributes to, or stands in the way of, a clear account of Spinoza's position.

3.1 Human Activity and Passivity: 3 Preface–3p3

The dense opening elements of *Ethics* 3 introduce Spinoza's account of the affects. In 3 Preface, Spinoza rejects approaches to the human being that take us to differ from other things in nature. The definitions and axioms accordingly set out notions of activity and passivity that apply to all singular things and that serve as a basis for an account of human affects. I will refer to the doctrine of the Preface as Spinoza's *naturalism*. Naturalism is a view about both method and metaphysics. Methodologically, it is a commitment to approach any subject at all in the same way. In this case, Spinoza insists that the geometrical method is appropriate for all subjects and that he will address "human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (3 Preface). Metaphysically, Spinoza's naturalism is the conviction that all things are alike in basic ways. Notably, human beings are like other things in nature in basic ways. Spinoza presents a stiff challenge for himself in these commitments: he must explain the sometimes extraordinary and complex emotional lives of human beings in a geometric argument and in terms that do not make human beings fundamentally different from other things in nature. From 3d3–3p3, he takes initial steps toward meeting this challenge.

Stated broadly, Spinoza's metaphysical naturalism is the rejection of any view on which "man in nature" is "a dominion within a dominion" (3 Preface). Instead, there is only one dominion, nature, and human affects must be understood in the way that anything else is understood:

Nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, that is, the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, through the universal laws and rules of nature. (3 Preface)

A closer look at what Spinoza takes himself to be rejecting in this sweeping claim can help us to understand his aims in *Ethics* 3. First, in insisting that the laws according to which all things happen are everywhere the same, Spinoza maintains that it would be a mistake for a human being to think that he has "absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself." Instead, Spinoza argues, "the affects of hate, anger, envy and the like . . . follow with the same necessity and force of Nature as the other singular things" (G2/138, 3 Preface). Second, in insisting that the way of understanding anything must always be the same, Spinoza claims that it is a mistake to understand human "impotence and inconstancy" in terms of some sort of "vice of human nature" rather than as something that happens as a result of the "common power of nature" (3 Preface G2/137). The project of *Ethics* 3 is to produce an account of the affects that avoids both mistakes. Spinoza wants to produce proper accounts of how passions arise and of how they render human beings weak and inconstant. Unlike those writers (it is not clear to me whether Spinoza has a particular target here) who make weakness and inconstancy a vice to be censured, Spinoza seeks to understand these problems, and, eventually, to understand how, however imperfectly, we might mitigate them.

While Spinoza's rejection of Descartes's theory of free will both in God and in human beings is explicit and detailed (1p32–1p33, 2p48–2p49cs), the first two definitions of Part 3 subtly challenge a conception of action and passion that is equally fundamental to Descartes's psychology. Descartes begins the *Passions of the Soul* with a broad, traditionally Aristotelian (see Aristotle's *Physics* 3.3), theory of action and passion on which any passion is always also an action: "What is a passion with regard to one subject is always an action in some other regard" (*Passions* 1.1). Supposing that there are discrete causes and effects for all passions,

Descartes takes the event to be an action in the event's cause and a passion in the event's effect. In applying this general theory of passion to the human soul, then, Descartes considers events that are typically actions of "animal spirits" (*les esprits animaux*) in the human body and passions in the human soul or mind (*Passions* 1.14, 1.16, 1.27).

As we have seen (§2.2), in his account of imagination Spinoza considers sensation, paradigmatically, in terms of transitive causation and two partial causes. For example, in the detailed terminology of 2p16–2p17s, when my nature interacts with the sun's nature, these two natures are each partial causes of the corporeal image in my body correlate to the idea of imagination that I have in regarding the sun as present. (That idea, likewise, has partial causes in my nature and the sun's nature, under the mode of thought.) At 3d1, Spinoza defines such partial causes and, by contrast, fully adequate causes, in terms of understanding: a cause is adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly (that is, adequately) perceived through it, but it is partial or inadequate if the effect cannot be understood through it alone. At 3d2, he makes action, strictly speaking, adequate causation. Neither the sun nor I act in this sense in the case of imagination. We are passive, however, whenever "something happens in us of which we are only a partial cause." Therefore, all instances in which we are passive, for Spinoza as for Descartes, are changes in us. However, by 3d2—and this is a significant departure from Descartes—a human mind itself is always a cause, albeit a partial cause, of such changes in it, and so always active to a degree. This theory accommodates Spinoza's incrementalism nicely.

At 3d3, 3post1, and 3post2, which focus on the human body, Spinoza moves from this broad account of activity and passivity to an account of human affects. These elements do not enter the account of *Ethics* 3 again until Spinoza draws upon elements of his account of the corporeal imagination (notably, his principle of association) at 3p14 in order to defend particular theses about the passions. Spinoza's account of the mind-body relation commits him to a psycho-physical account of action and passion, however, so the elements serve the purpose of showing that whatever he writes about mind in introducing the passions has a corporeal counterpart.

An affection (*affectio*), broadly, is any mode (1d5). At 3d3, the term may be taken in that sense, but change, that is, the "something that happens in us," that 3d2 introduces, holds particular interest. The subtly different concept of an affect (*affectus*) picks out changes of a particular sort. At 3d3,

Spinoza defines “affect” as any affection “by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and, at the same time, the ideas of these affections.” To anticipate, these will be what we might ordinarily regard as emotions of joy and sadness. Note that Spinoza refers to thought also (“ideas of these affections”) at 3d3, suggesting that emotions are equally psychological and physical. At 3post1, Spinoza maintains that many different changes may happen in bodies: some are affects in the sense of 3d3, but there are also changes in us that neither increase nor diminish our power. At 3post2, Spinoza maintains that passions in the body can be varieties of corporeal image in the sense of 2p17s. The postulate suggests that correlate ideas, or passions in the human mind, will then be ideas of imagination.

The first three propositions of *Ethics* 3 draw upon 3d1 and 3d2, together with central elements of *Ethics* 2, in order to establish basic theses about the activity and passivity of human minds. Having associated adequate causation with activity and inadequate causation with passivity at 3d2, Spinoza draws upon a further association at 3p1. In his theory of ideas, as we have seen (§2.2, §2.4), Spinoza associates adequate causation in a mind with adequate ideas, and inadequate causation with inadequate ideas. If the associations have the right form, he should be able to defend 3p1 by something like the transitivity of identity: we act insofar as we have adequate ideas and are passive insofar as we have inadequate ideas. Although the demonstration to 3p1 is complex, this is in effect the argument that Spinoza makes there. At 3p3, Spinoza argues that this is an exhaustive account of the mind’s activity and passivity: there is nothing to a mind other than its adequate and inadequate ideas; therefore, the mind’s action and passivity are to be understood wholly in these terms. Note that the term “passions” at 3p3 seems—given the range of affections described at 3post1—to refer to any activity in which the mind is passive to some degree and not, more narrowly, to affects that are passions. That is, in its assertion that some corporeal passions do not change the power of the body, 3post1 at least suggests that some ideas of imagination in a mind do not change its power.

At 3p2 and its scholium, Spinoza rejects any account of human activity on which the human mind has any effect on the human body or the human body has any effect on the human mind. While Descartes depends upon free will for his account of mind-body interaction and Spinoza has already

criticized the Cartesian doctrine of free will at length at 2p49s, this new discussion is justified by the points, first, that 2p49s has as its principal topic the question of whether we assent to our own ideas and not mind-body interaction and, second, that a great variety of theologians and philosophers other than Descartes endorse some version of the idea that we freely will some of our actions. In the argument, Spinoza frequently invokes the complexity of the body as a means of explaining what an adherent of freely willed action might think can only be explained by mind.

To take stock of this dense discussion, Spinoza's view is that we may discuss human beings and human activity in terms either of mind or of body, but, as the causal barrier between the attribute requires, we may not invoke mind-body interaction. To begin in corporeal terms, then, the human body is wholly active only when it is the adequate or total cause of an effect, and it is passive to a degree when it is the partial cause, again to a degree, of an effect. A change to the body, whether as a result of the body's activity or passivity, is an affection (or mode) of the body. Among affections, those in which the power of the body is increased or diminished are human affects. All of these concepts apply *mutatis mutandis* to the human mind: causation, activity, passivity, affections, and affects are all properties that we have insofar as we are minds as well. In addition, however, whenever a mind is wholly active, that activity arises from adequate ideas, and whenever it is (to some degree) passive, its contribution to its effects arises from its inadequate ideas. Adequate and inadequate ideas, although they must have correlate modes in the body, are modes of minds only.

3.1.1 Should We Call Spinoza a "Naturalist"?

I apply the label "naturalism" to the doctrine of 3 Preface and take the view to include two commitments. First, Spinoza expresses *metaphysical naturalism*, the view that, in his terms, because nature and its laws are everywhere the same, there are no things that are not governed by its laws. Spinoza expresses this commitment by invoking the analogy of natural law to the laws of states in 3 Preface. Any entity that we might think is governed by special laws or is exempt from these laws, he asserts, is not. In particular, human beings are not "a dominion within a dominion." If all things are governed by universal determinism and necessity, for example,

we are also. Second, Spinoza expresses *methodological naturalism*, the view that all things are to be explained in the same way and by the same method. Because “naturalism” is a label for positions that philosophers today take to be plausible or at least important, the application of “naturalism” to Spinoza’s positions amounts to a suggestion that the positions are among those in the *Ethics* that hold enduring philosophical interest. Are these two positions recognizably the same as those that continue to matter to philosophers today? Alexander Douglas has suggested powerfully that they are not. Here I defend the use of the label. The issue matters, I think, for our understanding of Spinoza’s enduring importance to philosophy.

Most frequently, recent philosophers who have espoused metaphysical naturalism so understood have been physicalists. On their strong and highly restrictive account of what is generally true, it is generally true that things are physical. In the face of hard cases—the intentionality of thought or the relevance of numbers to our understanding of the world, for example—these naturalists do not admit exceptions: everything is physical, so, if they are things, thought and numbers are physical.

Even if physicalists are metaphysical naturalists, however, there is no need to take metaphysical naturalism to be simply equivalent to physicalism. What makes physicalists metaphysical naturalists is, first, that their metaphysics includes the claim that all things are natural and, second, that, on their account of nature, the first claim is highly restrictive: to say that all things are natural is to say something that matters. Spinoza’s account of nature is highly restrictive in ways that differ from physicalism, but it is also highly restrictive. Notably, nature, on Spinoza’s view, excludes any uncaused existent, any unexplained existent, or any alternative possibility. Indeed, these commitments are *more* highly restrictive than many views that advertise themselves as physicalist. To be sure, nature, on Spinoza’s account, includes a wide variety, perhaps even an infinite variety, of finite entities. All of these entities are determined and necessitated, however, and no entity of a given attribute interacts with any entity of another attribute. The statement of naturalism at the Preface to *Ethics* 3 suggests that Spinoza is particularly concerned to show that these general truths apply to human desire, good, evil, and virtue. In doing so, I think that he anticipates philosophers who, today, take themselves to be ethical naturalists and who also need not be physicalists.

In taking Spinoza to be a methodological naturalist, I take him to maintain that the method by which one rightly seeks to understand nature is the only method by which one can rightly seek to understand anything. Frequently, in the same way that physicalism is identified with metaphysical naturalists, those who call themselves methodological naturalists identify that commitment with an approach to knowledge that emphasizes observation. Such a view is evident, for example, in Quine's understanding of philosophy as a practice that is continuous with science. Just as, in the first case, the identification depends upon a further commitment, on which the natural and the physical are identical, so, in this case, the identification depends on the conviction that the right way to understand nature emphasizes observation.

Once again, however, I think that incorporating this further positive view into the question of Spinoza's naturalism is a distraction. It is a substantive commitment for Spinoza to say that one needs to study human beings as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies. Working scientists today do not adhere to this method, and most natural philosophers of Spinoza's day also would have rejected it. The question of what one thinks the right way of studying nature is, however, differs from the question of whether one thinks that everything ought to be studied in the same way that nature is studied. Spinoza certainly accepted the latter view, and it seems undeniable that this commitment substantively shapes his accounts of human affects, value, and eschatology in *Ethics* 3–5.

Methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism are frequently related. Thus, for example, one might argue that if one can attain all attainable knowledge whatever through the methods by which one can understand nature, then metaphysical naturalism is warranted. Or, conversely, one might maintain that because metaphysical naturalism is true, one can attain knowledge of all things by adhering exclusively to the methods that one applies in understanding nature. It is a final argument for finding Spinoza to be a naturalist in a meaningful sense that he strongly asserts a view of the second kind. His assertion is highly controversial, and it might be problematically circular as well, if his conviction that all things are natural is a result, in the first place, of his application of methodological naturalism. Whether his view is sound, however, is a different question from whether it is substantial, interesting, and relevantly similar to naturalisms today.

3.1.2 Does the *Ethics* Offer a Coherent Account of Finite Causation?

Ethics 3 begins with definitions, postulates, and propositions characterizing causation. While 3post1 and 3post2, because they depend upon the great complexity of the human body, might be thought to apply only to things like us, Spinoza's incrementalism and naturalism suggest strongly that 3d1 and 3d2 apply to all singular things and that 3d3, 3p1, and 3p2 apply to all minimally complex singular things that are bodies and minds, that is, all ordinary objects. Passages in earlier parts of the *Ethics*, however, also offer accounts of the causation in human beings and singular things. These include, notably, propositions leading to and including Spinoza's defense of determinism at 1p28; the definitions of "singular thing" (2d7) and "individual" (in the physical discursus following 2p13); and the accounts of the causal activity of the human body in imagination (2p16–2p18) and reason (2p38–2p39).

The new claims raise some, perhaps mild, puzzles about the order of presentation in the *Ethics*. For example, 3post1, on the human body's power of acting, seems fundamental to Spinoza's account of the human body. It draws directly upon the claims about the body's nature in the physical discursus, where Spinoza emphasizes the characteristic ratio of motion and rest that makes the body an individual. Why, though, does Spinoza not discuss power in the physical discursus? Why, in the opening elements of *Ethics* 3, does he not offer an account of the ways in which the concepts of ratio and nature, which are central to 2p13sl5 and 2p13sl7, inform the concept of a body's power of acting, which is central to 3post1? Again, the accounts of imagination and error in *Ethics* 2 draw upon the association of inadequate causation and inadequate ideas. Those accounts might have been clearer had some account of the doctrines of 3d1 and 3p1 preceded them.

The new material also raises stronger concerns about the complexity and, finally, the coherence of Spinoza's account of finite things. Consider complexity first. At 2d7, Spinoza defines "singular thing" in causal terms: "if a number of Individuals so concur in one action that together they are the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing." Suppose that the sun and my body are the only partial causes of the corporeal image of the sun that is an effect in my body (a simplification). By 2d7, we should conclude that the sun and my body are, at least in this

one event, one singular thing. The first two definitions of *Ethics* 3 add detail to the account. By 3d1, this thing (the sun-and-my-body thing) is the adequate cause of what it does, and by 3d2 (if what Spinoza writes there about “us” applies to singular things more broadly) this thing acts. My body, by contrast, is a partial cause of the effect, so it is acted on by 3d2, and is, to this extent, not a singular thing by 2d7. The greater thing of which, by 2d7, I am a component, then, is active in a case in which I myself am passive, and it is a more of a singular thing than its component, at least with respect to the effect. If I am the fully adequate cause of some other effect, then, again by 2d7 Spinoza will consider me a singular thing “to that extent.”

At 3d3, Spinoza adds the concepts of affects and power to this complex account of a thing and its activity: a given thing—Spinoza emphasizes the human body—has affects, that is, affections in which its power of acting increases or diminishes. Suppose that my interaction with the sun diminishes my power of acting. To anticipate, this will mean that I experience a harmful passion, such as melancholy, in the interaction (3p11s). Thus, I am a singular thing to a lesser extent by 2d7. By 3d3 I am also less powerful. Is this description redundant, that is, is to be a singular thing to a lesser degree just to be less powerful? Because power at 3d3 is a power of acting, and acting is a causal notion (and therefore invoked at 2d7), it may seem that for me to be a singular thing to a lesser extent just is for me to be less powerful. The General Definition of the Affects at the end of *Ethics* 3 may support this conclusion. Spinoza writes there that joy or sadness of the mind is an idea of body that expresses “more or less reality than it had affirmed of the body.”

Suppose, however, that the opposite happens and that in the interaction my power of acting increases: the sun makes me cheerful (3p11s). In this case, I am again something less than a singular thing by 2d7, because again I am only a partial cause of the affect. I am, however, more powerful and, in the sense of the General Definition, more real. The relation between 2d7 and the account of power at the beginning of *Ethics* 3 now becomes less clear. Spinoza appears to maintain that finite things can be at the same time, in a single instance of partial causation, less than fully things and, again in some sense, more powerful things.

Where, following Spinoza’s account of his own project at 2 Preface, readers conceive of the structure of the *Ethics* as an argument that secures

those consequences of the completely general account of God in *Ethics* 1 that matter to an account of the human mind and its blessedness, the narrowing of topic in *Ethics* 3 seems appropriate. After all, blessedness is an affective state of the human mind that it attains to the extent that it can overcome the bondage to passion and gain knowledge. In order to understand blessedness and the means to it, Spinoza has offered an account of the human mind in *Ethics* 2 and now turns, still more specifically, to an account of human action and passion. Action and passion as Spinoza conceives them are, however, closely related to our natures or essences or definitions. This raises problems for readers of the *Ethics*. Spinoza, in effect, turns to a discussion of our essences only after he has discussed the human body and the human mind in great detail, creating a formidable challenge for his readers.

3.2 Human Striving to Persevere in Being: 3p4–3p10

In the opening elements of *Ethics* 3, as we have seen, Spinoza characterizes the activity of singular things, and particularly of human beings, in terms of adequate and inadequate causation; adequate and inadequate ideas; and power. The propositions that follow, 3p4–3p10, build toward a more specific account of activity in terms of what singular things, and particularly human beings, do when we act: we persevere in being. One might expect an account of what human beings do when they act to include an account of what we want to do or are trying to do, and Spinoza works to meet that expectation in these propositions. At 3p9s, he moves from an account of the striving for perseverance in being to an account of human desire.

In the most general terms, “each thing, as far as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*] strives to persevere in its being” (3p6, translation modified). As Spinoza’s naturalism requires, he maintains also that human minds strive to persevere, and this doctrine serves as a basis for his theory of desire and the other affects. In building toward a theory of desire at 3p9s, Spinoza reintroduces the 3p3 distinction between the actions and passions of the human mind and adds the concept of consciousness of striving (3p9): we strive to persevere both when we are active (or are adequate causes) and also when we are passive (or are inadequate causes), and we are conscious of this striving. One might, on a first reading of 3p6, take Spinoza simply to

maintain that all human beings, like all things, want to persevere in being. While perseverance in being surely does figure prominently in Spinoza's conative psychology, these distinctions give Spinoza the flexibility to develop a more nuanced account of human desire.

Two strands of argument contribute to the difficult, much discussed demonstration of 3p6. Neither, frustratingly, includes either the term "striving" (*conatus*) or the term "to persevere" (*perseverare*), so it is difficult to reconstruct a valid argument in the precise terminology of the demonstration for the proposition. The first strand of argument, which invokes the notion of a singular or particular thing, has its foundations in central propositions of *Ethics* 1, but the second is wholly new to the *Ethics*.

To begin with the deeply founded view, Spinoza takes God to be all creative power or power of being, and he takes singular things to express God's power in a certain and determinate way. In other words, to be a singular thing (as Spinoza maintains explicitly at 2d7) is to be a cause. These doctrines figure in the first part of 3p6dem, where Spinoza cites 1p25c and 1p34, elements of *Ethics* 1 that depend in turn on central accounts, there, of God's nature and activity, including 1p11, 1p14, and 1p15 (see §1.2). God's causal power is a power to bring about God's own existence. If what Spinoza calls at 3p6dem the certain and determinate expression of God's power in a singular thing is a kind of power to bring about the thing's own existence, then something very close to 3p6 follows quickly. On this view, God acts to bring about God's existence, and, because God is infinite, God is always efficacious. A singular thing acts, likewise, to bring about its own existence, but, being finite, it is not always efficacious. Like God, it always acts to exist, but unlike God, it does not always bring about its own existence.

The second strand of 3p6dem begins with 3p4, which is new to the *Ethics* and, Spinoza claims, self-evident: "no thing can be destroyed except through an external cause." It also incorporates 3p5, which depends only upon 3p4: "Things are of a contrary nature, i.e., cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other." These propositions appear to complement 1p25c and 1p34 in the argument to 3p6.

The position of 3p4 has been controversial both as a metaphysical doctrine in its own right and also as a premise in the demonstrations that follow in 3p5, 3p6, and 3p8. To consider its plausibility first, while Spinoza takes 3p4 to be self-evident, commentators have frequently raised

objections to it by arguing that all sorts of things do at least seem to destroy themselves: is a lit candle, a time bomb, or a lump of uranium not a thing? Spinoza himself will similarly be concerned with the case of apparent human self-destruction in suicide (4p20s). Even if we grant 3p4, it may also seem implausible considered as a premise in an argument to 3p6. From the fact that a given thing does not destroy itself, why should it follow that the thing therefore strives to persevere in being?

The second concern might be mitigated by the argument of 3p4dem, where—as we have seen before in the discussion of the affirmation relation above, §2.4—Spinoza invokes his difficult theory of definition: “the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing’s essence” (see §1.1.1 and §2.4). This premise suggests that 3p4 itself may be understated. If Spinoza’s view were merely that the definition of a thing never denies a thing, such a modest view might support the conclusion that no thing, understood properly (that is, by its real definition), destroys itself. Spinoza’s view of definition, however, is stronger: a definition affirms a thing’s essence. It suggests that the real definition of a thing includes an activity of positing or affirming the thing. For a thing to be a genuine thing, susceptible of real definition, by this reasoning, it has to have a tendency to exist. So understood, 3p4 adds only that a thing does not, in addition to having this tendency, also have a tendency to destroy itself.

It is difficult to know what precisely 3p5 means. A natural reading suggests that it refers to two parts of a subject: if A is of a contrary nature to B, then A and B cannot both be in C. Spinoza does not use 3p5 in this sense at 3p6dem, where he takes 3p5 to mean instead that a subject itself opposes everything that can take away its—the subject’s own—existence. The argument of 3p10 that a mind cannot have an idea that excludes the existence of its body depends on a similar commitment. In addition to these uses of the proposition, the citation of 3p4 at 3p5dem suggests the same thing because 3p4 does not concern opposed parts. All of these points suggest, as John Carriero has argued, that 3p5, properly understood, refers to just one element of a given subject: if A is of a contrary nature to B, then A cannot be in B. Some interesting uses of 3p5 follow in Spinoza’s accounts of the affects, however, that may be uses in the more straightforward sense (4p7dem, 4p30dem). Spinoza does frequently offer accounts of one affect destroying another in the same person. If he

maintains a version of 3p5 in the straightforward sense, it should influence our interpretation of these doctrines.

The first and second strands of 3p6dem, so understood, invoke Spinoza's theory of the natures of existing finite things in a way that might seem redundant. The nature (by the first strand) or definition (by the second strand) or essence (by both strands) of a finite thing explains or affirms or causes its existence. These concepts are similar. What the second strand adds to the first, I think, is an account of the persistence and destruction of singular things. At 1p11dem 2, the best basis for the first strand, Spinoza suggests that the existence of finite things depends upon the order of nature. Supposing that a singular thing's definition posits its existence, it will exist so long as nothing outside of it prevents it from existing. This is part of Spinoza's explanation for God's necessary existence at 1p11dem2: there is nothing outside of God's nature, so there is nothing to prevent God from existing. When a particular thing does exist, it is because the order of nature makes it necessary, and when it does not exist, it is because the order of nature makes existence impossible.

What 3p4 and 3p5 add are temporal details. Suppose that the order of nature permits my existence. How long will I last? By 3p4 and 3p5, that cannot be known from knowing my nature. I cannot be destroyed unless a cause that is not myself destroys me, by 3p4, and that cause—if it need be said—cannot be in me, by 3p5. In greater detail, then, the fact that I have a real definition or a nature means that I will exist if the order of things outside me permits it. The conditions that permit or do not permit my existence, however, may change. Thus a change in conditions allows me to come into existence, and another change in conditions destroys me.

The propositions about destruction (3p4 and 3p5) are assertions that the cause that ends the existence of any finite thing, just like the cause that permits that existence, is external. The striving to persevere of an existing thing, so understood, just is that tendency that it has to exist when external circumstances permit its existence. That is why Spinoza concludes that striving is the actual essence of an existing thing at 3p7. At 3p8, he argues on the basis of 3p4 that the time of a thing's striving is indefinite because its destruction is not in the nature of a thing itself but in external causes. Like the existence of a finite thing itself, destruction will be necessary within the order of nature as 1p11dem2 requires. The duration of finite things is

indefinite, however, in the sense that it cannot be known from knowledge of the things themselves.

All causal power, 3p6 and the reference to God at 3p6dem suggest, whether it is attributed to substance or to the singular things that express substance in a certain and determinate way, is a power to exist. Because finite things are defeasible, their power does not always secure their existence, and they are sometimes destroyed. The causal situation of finite things, however, is more complex than mere success or failure because we are frequently partial causes of effects in ourselves and other things. We have already seen that Spinoza's consideration of partial causation informs his theories of imagination and reason in *Ethics* 2 (see §2.2 and §2.4). At 3p9, Spinoza reintroduces the topic of partial causation, now in terms of the striving to persevere.

The position of 3p9 resembles Descartes's account of the stone in the sling. Stones have their own tendencies, which they will act on when they are not influenced by external forces. When external forces, such as slings, do interfere with them, stones' contribution to the resulting motion should still be understood in terms of these tendencies: the stone still strives to move in a straight line and that striving explains its contribution to the resulting motion. Similarly, on Spinoza's account of striving at 3p9, human minds tend, from their own nature, to persevere in being, and, where they are the total or adequate causes of what they do, they do persevere. Spinoza has associated adequate causation with adequate ideas at 3p3, so he can conclude at 3p9 that insofar as minds have adequate ideas, they persevere in being. When external forces interfere with minds, this changes the effect. As in the first case, however, a mind's own contribution to that effect is nevertheless to be understood in terms of its own proper causal tendency: minds strive to persevere in being even when they are the partial causes of what they do. Spinoza contends at 3p9 that "both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being." How precisely this thesis about our activity as partial causes informs Spinoza's accounts of those activities remains a difficult interpretative question. In its bare counterfactual form—If I had been a total cause in this instance of partial causation, I would have persevered in being—it is not very informative.

In addition to the distinction between action and passion, Spinoza's account of the activity of human minds at 3p9 reintroduces his views about

consciousness. At 2p21–2p23, Spinoza had argued that the mind knows itself insofar as it knows ideas of affections of bodies. Thus, to build on a familiar example, when I see the sun, my mind has an idea of the corporeal affection, or image, that is the effect of the interaction of my body and the sun (I imagine the sun) and also an idea of that idea (I am aware that I am imagining the sun). At 3p9, Spinoza contends that minds are conscious of their striving, and he does so on the basis of 2p23. This assertion leads directly to his introduction of familiar doctrines of conative psychology at 3p9s. Striving related to mind only he calls will (*voluntas*); striving related to mind and body together is appetite (*appetitus*); and appetite together with consciousness of appetite is desire (*cupiditas*). Note, however, that Spinoza does not take these distinctions to matter in some contexts, a point that he emphasizes in the appendix (3defaff1exp).

Desire is the first of the three principal affects in Spinoza's account. The use of 2p23 at 3p9dem indicates, as does Spinoza's assertion that the mind is conscious of its striving, that he takes desire to be a conscious state. This identification of striving and desire might suggest an easy answer to the question, which remains largely unanswered at 3p9 itself, of how we strive as inadequate or partial causes: we desire to persevere in being but somehow imperfectly. Perhaps we do not know how to persevere or misjudge the actions necessary to persevere. Such a conclusion, I think, would be hasty. The theory of ideas of ideas, recall, is a theory about what the mind does *not* know. Our self-knowledge in such ideas is inadequate (2p29) and "confused and mutilated" (2p29). It is not clear that our consciousness of ourselves, so described, would include the veridical reproduction in conscious desire of our nature as a striving to persevere in being.

While some passages in the *Ethics*—such at the 1app claim that "men act always on account of their advantage, which they want"—do suggest that we always consciously desire something like perseverance, many others do not. Spinoza's further account of desire at 3p9s suggests a more intricate account of the conscious object of desire. It emphasizes "good":

From all this, then, it is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it. (3p9s)

The passage suggests that I will think anything that I desire good and that I will do so because I desire that thing. Just after introducing desire, then, Spinoza characterizes the ends of our conscious desire in terms not of perseverance but of our value judgments.

3.2.1 What, for Spinoza, Is a Genuine Finite Thing?

The striving doctrine is a general characterization of finite things' effects. Insofar as any singular thing is an adequate cause, that is, the total cause of some effect, that effect is always its own perseverance in being. Insofar as any singular thing is an inadequate or partial cause, its contribution to a given effect may also be understood in terms of its striving. So stated, a reader might find in the doctrine a principle of individuation: a genuine thing, 3p4–3p6 suggest, strives to persevere in its being.

As we have seen, two definitions earlier in the *Ethics* may also indicate what, on Spinoza's view, is a genuine finite thing. At 2d7, Spinoza asserts that a number of individuals are a singular thing to the extent that they are the cause of one effect. In the physical discursus, he defines an "individual" as that which is composed by a number of bodies that "lie upon one another" or that communicate their motions to one another in a fixed ratio.

The three accounts may complement one another. Thus, a body that is a genuine thing in all three senses (1) is composed of bodies in such a way that either they lie upon one another or they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner; (2) is the cause of an effect; and (3) does not destroy itself but, to the contrary, strives to persevere in being. It is not immediately clear that they need to be understood in this way, however, and understanding the relation between the views remains challenging.

Perhaps the discussion of striving can help. The demonstration to 3p6 offers direct evidence of the material equivalence of "singular things" and "things that strive." Reading that evidence back into the other propositions, it seems clear that all of 3p4–3p8 refer to singular things. While 3p9 refers only to human beings and only to minds, Spinoza's naturalism suggests that it applies to all singular things under the attribute of thought: all of their causal activity, whether as adequate or as inadequate causes, is a striving to persevere in being.

Spinoza's accounts of human beings, moreover, offer some evidence that all and only individuals are singular things. The essence of a human body,

Spinoza writes at 4p24dem, is the characteristic ratio of motion among its parts that, by the definition of “individual,” makes it an individual: “The parts composing the human body pertain to the essence of the body itself only insofar as they communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed manner (2p13def)” (see also 4p39). At 3p7, however, Spinoza contends that the striving of any thing is its actual essence. These passages suggest, then, that, at least in the human case, a human being is a singular thing and an individual in virtue of the same property, its ratio or striving. Further evidence of this point may be found at 4app9, where Spinoza uses the terms “individuals” and “singular things” interchangeably. If this is true of all other cases, then all and only individuals are singular things.

Read strictly, on the other hand, Spinoza’s definition of “individual” suggests that there are fewer individuals than singular things. A first reason for thinking so is that, individuals, by that definition, are bodies, whereas singular things may be bodies, minds, and things of other attributes. Perhaps, however, this evidence should not be moving. Because the *discursus* concerns physical things in particular, perhaps Spinoza might be well understood there only to define what it is for a body to be an individual. It does not seem too much of a stretch to think that the idea of any body that is an individual is also well-regarded as an individual and, turning to the murky realm of other attributes, that any individual’s counterpart in any other attribute is likewise an individual. While most of Spinoza’s uses of “individual” (*individuum*) do apply most clearly to body, some, which emphasize membership in a genus (1p8s2 and 4 Preface at G2/207) do seem perfectly general.

There are, however, two further reasons to think that there might be fewer individuals than singular things. First, individuals, again by the definition, are always composite. They are made up of “bodies” according to the definition, and, if we take the license to assume that Spinoza takes there to be individuals in other attributes, we should take a similarly neutral term to describe the constituents of those individuals. For example, we should say that an individual mind is made up of ideas. It is not clear that singular things are always composite. The second sentence of 2d7 concerns composite singular things; indeed, by it, they are composed of individuals. The first sentence of 2d7—on which a singular thing is merely something that is finite and has a determinate existence—might seem, however, to

characterize something fully simple. Such singular things, so understood, make up individuals and so are more plentiful than them.

Second, as we have seen, to be a singular thing is a matter of degree: a group of individuals is a singular thing to the extent that it has one effect. Individuality—at least on the definition of “individual”—is not a matter of degree. A given individual composed of two parts that has an effect, then, might incorporate three singular things—albeit two only to a degree—if it is a total cause and each of its parts a partial cause of the effect. Perhaps Spinoza’s doctrine of striving adds details to his view that can help us to understand these puzzling features of his view and so to understand better what he takes finite things to be.

3.2.2 What Is Human Essence?

At 3p7, Spinoza contends that any singular thing’s striving is its “actual essence” (*essentia actualis*). This terminology is rare in the *Ethics*. At 4p4dem, citing 3p7, Spinoza argues that the power by which any human being (and, indeed, any singular thing) strives to preserve its being is the power of God insofar as it can be explained through the human being’s actual essence. Perhaps 2p11 is also relevant. It is the claim that the “actual being of a human mind” (*actuale mentis humanae esse*) is the idea of a singular thing that actually exists.

Other passages in the *Ethics* characterize essence or nature in other terms. These include the definition of the essence of any thing as what is necessary and sufficient for the existence and conception of that thing (2d2). Spinoza also makes a number of claims about human essence. While his criticism of common, imaginative universals (2p40s1) is strong, he also at least appears to think that some assertions about species are true. For example, he maintains that the definition of “human being” (1p8s2) or, perhaps equivalently, human essence (2a1) does not necessitate the existence of any particular human being.

Understanding these various claims about essence is difficult. It also matters to the interpretation of *Ethics* 3–5, in which, as Spinoza’s extensive use of 3p7 in *Ethics* 3–5 shows, striving and human nature are central concerns. Spinoza’s assertions about human essence suggest that he finds it to be a concept better than the imaginative universals that he criticizes. That point leaves room, however, for us to attribute to Spinoza a range of

different views of human essence. He might, for example, take human essence to be a helpful, though imaginative, notion. He might take it to be a genuine essence in the sense of 2d2, raising the questions of how it meets that definition and how human nature relates to each human being. Or, as Karolina Hübner argues, he might take human essence to be a concept that captures a truth about the world while nevertheless not having a particular object, a being of reason.

“Actual” in Spinoza’s use at 3p7 is a temporal notion: what exists actually exists now. “Essence” without qualification or “individual essence” or “formal essence” refers to an eternal truth. To understand the relation between these notions, consider, for example, that Spinoza existed in Holland from 1632–1677. While the individual or formal essence of Spinoza includes these truths, which were true before and during his life and remain true now, Spinoza’s actual essence was that configuration of parts in motion in Holland during that time. This doctrine anticipates Spinoza’s account of eternity of the mind in *Ethics* 5 (see §5.4).

Perhaps Spinoza lacks a theory of species essence, and these views about individuals are his only views about essence. A reader who defends this position finds support in Spinoza’s criticism of imaginative universals. She also faces, however, a difficult question about Spinoza’s emphasis on humanity in his ethics. If my essence is peculiar to me, and what is good for me is what makes me more perfect or more powerful, why should Spinoza define and present the good in terms of a model of human nature (see, especially, 4 Preface, 4d1–4d2)? Instead, it may seem that we should all conceive of a model of and seek to perfect our own natures, each of which differs in some respects. Why will Spinoza be confident that when we act from reason we will always agree in nature (4p35), and why do we disagree in nature only insofar as we are passionate (4p33)? Spinoza’s characterization of individual essence as a striving to persevere in being is difficult to reconcile with these claims about nature.

3.2.3 Does Spinoza Accept Finite Teleology?

Spinoza founds his theory of desire on his striving doctrine at 3p9s. Such a doctrine might, as we have seen, be a theory of efficient causation: on Cartesian physics, a rock’s contribution to any effect of which it is a cause is to be understood in terms of its tendency to continue in a straight line. On

3p6, and even 3p9, a human mind's contribution to any effect of which it is a cause is, likewise, to be understood in terms of tendency to persevere. Theories of desire, however, typically include claims about future states—what we aim at in our desires. They are therefore typically understood to be part of teleological explanations: it is because I want to eat chocolate later that I put money in my pocket and walk to the store now. Once Spinoza founds a theory of desire upon his theory of striving, striving seems also to be a teleological doctrine.

I consider the question of teleology in finite things together with the question of teleology in God above (§1.4.1). Here, I will take for granted Spinoza's rejection of teleology in God and consider more closely the challenges that Spinoza's theory of desire presents for what I think is the most promising interpretation of his views about striving. The most promising option, I think, is that Spinoza rejects all teleological explanation and, despite producing a number of interesting claims about desires in causally efficient terms, fails to produce a theory of human desire that is consistent with that rejection. My principal grounds for taking Spinoza to reject finite teleology, once again, are Spinoza's basic metaphysical commitments. His strong determinism and his necessitarianism rule out any teleology, including teleology in finite things. His naturalism rules out making an exception of this generalization for human beings. I also think that Spinoza recognizes and endorses this implication of his metaphysical commitments. He writes at 1app that all final causes are nothing but human fictions (G2/80). Lest human desire somehow be thought exempt from this universal truth, Spinoza offers an example of human desire at 4 Preface; explains precisely how it is mistaken for a final cause; and asserts that it is really an efficient cause:

For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really an efficient cause, which is considered as a first cause, because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their appetites. For as I have often said before, they are conscious of their actions and appetites, but not aware of the causes by which they are determined to want something. (G2/207)

For readers who think that Spinoza permits some finite teleology, I think that the theory of desire is the most promising place in the *Ethics* to find such a thing and this passage, therefore, is the most problematic passage.

If Spinoza does reject all finite teleology, however, the problem that his theory of desire faces is that he cannot explain the thoughts of future states that we have in desiring. Perhaps Spinoza distinguishes here among two elements of an idea: the first element is the occurrent mental state that is the man's desire now; and the second element is the objective envisioned in that desire, the completed house. If this is his view, Spinoza's insistence that this desire is really an efficient cause may be understood as the view that it is the occurrent mental state, which precedes or is contemporaneous with the action, that is its efficient cause. Spinoza can explain the man's mistake in terms of this distinction: his mistake is to think that it is the object of that idea—the future, completed house—that causes the action.

This account of the mistake appears to be inconsistent, however, with Spinoza's basic commitments in metaphysics because it appears to render the envisioned completed house epiphenomenal. Spinoza maintains that all existents have effects (1p36). The envisioned completed house would appear to be an existent, albeit one of an odd sort. What is its effect? Nor is this problem limited to a few rare desires. Accounts of desire and passion that follow 3p9 frequently emphasize the objects of imagination—what brings us joy or pain—and the passions and desires associated with such objects.

Perhaps, confronted with the charge that the completed house is rendered epiphenomenal by his rejection of teleology, Spinoza would respond that, while it does not cause the builder's action, the object of the idea does have other effects. Perhaps, for example, the thought of a future house leads to the thought of living in the house. If the objects of our ideas in desiring have effects other than our actions, however, they should not be, as they are, the focus of his theory of desire, which does not seem to concern effects like these.

Another alternative is to identify the object of the desire, as Spinoza's theory of imagination requires, immediately with a corporeal image (which the idea *affirms*) and remotely with the external efficient cause of the image (which the idea *represents*). Neither of these is in the future, so neither need be anything but an efficient cause of the body's action, and Spinoza does have an account of how we imagine the future: we regard objects "as present" in ideas of the future as we do in all imagination, but we also associate such ideas with a future time (2p44s, 3p18). Such a theory, which

resembles Descartes's account of the response of animals to external stimuli, may succeed at eliminating some apparent teleology.

3.3 Passions, Desire, and Objects of Imagination: 3p11–3p50

Human affects, as Spinoza understands them, all are either the striving to persevere itself or are changes to striving. This can be shown briefly by a discussion of those affects from which, Spinoza contends at 3p11s, all of the others arise. As we have seen at §3.2, Spinoza defines desire as “appetite together with the consciousness of appetite” (3p9s). “Appetite,” however, is a specialized term for striving, so human desire is, basically, human striving. At 3p11 and its scholium Spinoza introduces the two other primitive affects, joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*). He defines joy as “passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection” and sadness as “passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection.” Spinoza refers to these changes at 3p11, in terms that he apparently takes to be equivalent (this equivalence is explicit at the end of 3defaff3), as an increase or diminution of the mind's power. Spinoza, however, takes a mind's power to be the same thing as its striving and the body's power to be the same thing as its striving (3p28dem.). By “joy,” then, Spinoza refers to an increased striving in a human mind; by “sadness,” he refers to a decreased striving. Striving, recall, is also a singular thing's actual essence, so these affects may also be regarded as an increase or diminution of actual essence.

Affects, as 2p7s requires, are psycho-physical. Spinoza presents some significant elements of his view in distinctively corporeal terms and others in distinctively thoughtful terms, a practice that raises interesting questions about his theory but that need not violate his views about mind and body. These views require that there be a correlate in thought for whatever is a passion in the body and in body for whatever is a passion in the mind, but they do not require that Spinoza describe that correlate.

The complexity of the human body, as presented notably in the physical discursus following 2p13 (see §2.2 above), grounds a basic distinction among affects that Spinoza introduces at 3p11s. Some passions are changes to the power, more of a part than of the whole person. Joy of this sort (*titillatio*) is pleasure, and sadness of this sort (*dolor*) is pain. This view is significant because it is not immediately clear whether what changes the power of part of a person changes the power of the whole in the same way.

Spinoza's detailed accounts of bondage and its mitigation, particularly in *Ethics* 4 (4p43, 4p44, 4p54s), will suggest that it does not always do so. The highly complex composition of the human body, then, yields a complex theory of passion, and Spinoza depends upon this complexity, and upon theses that he has already established about the human body in the physical discursus, throughout *Ethics* 3.

With the *Ethics* 3 claims about power and striving, Spinoza's theory of imagination is the most important component of his theory of the passions. Attention to 3p11 shows the importance of this theory: "The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind's power of thinking." Only a body can affect a body, by 2p6, so the thing that Spinoza refers to at 3p11 must be body. This claim means, then, that any idea that has as its object a body of a particular sort—that is, a body that aids my body's power of acting—aids my mind's power of thinking; likewise, any idea of a body that restrains my body's power of action will restrain my mind's power of thinking. Thus passionate joy relates closely to ideas of bodies that help my body, and sadness (which is always passionate) relates closely to ideas of bodies that harm my body. Spinoza's theory of imagination, as we have seen (§2.2), just is his theory of a mind's ideas of external bodies that affect its body, that is, of ideas of this kind. Indeed, Spinoza defines passions as confused or inadequate ideas in his "General Definition of the Affects" at the end of 3 Appendix (G2/203–204). (See 2p41dem for the clearest assertion that all confused ideas are ideas of imagination.) He relies extensively on *Ethics* 2 accounts of imagination in his accounts of the passions: he cites 2p16–2p18 in the passages that follow 3p11 and refers to imagination explicitly in 3p12, 3p13, 3p13c, and each of 3p16–3p35.

The propositions following 3p11 offer foundational accounts of the role of imagination in the theory of the passions. At 3p12, Spinoza argues that the mind strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting. He reasons, as I understand the demonstration, that, because the mind essentially strives to be powerful and because it is more powerful when the body is, the mind strives to imagine what makes the body more powerful. On similar grounds, Spinoza argues that the mind strives to imagine what excludes the existence of things that, it imagines, harm the body (3p13) and, what is perhaps more basic, that the mind strives

to avoid imagining what harms the body altogether (3p13c). Recall, in considering these views, that imagination, for Spinoza, is paradigmatically sensation. Thus, if Art Blakey brings me joy, then, by 3p12, I will strive to listen to more Art Blakey. If Eurovision makes me sad, then, by 3p13, I will strive whenever I hear Eurovision, to hear something else, and by 3p13c, to avoid thinking of Eurovision in the first place (which, alas, I have now failed to do).

In these first accounts of the relation between the passions, imagination, and desire, readers can arrive at a useful initial understanding of the human condition that Spinoza takes to be the human bondage to passion. Desire just is striving. The other passions, which are certain ideas of imagination, are changes to striving. Passions, then, are part of our ordinary experience of the world, and they frequently produce changes to our desires. Suppose that I have a well-formed desire to visit the library. On my way, I cannot help but interact with a number of external things, some of which are bound to incite passion. Thus, I may on my way to the library hear strands of Art Blakey coming from a local pub, which bring me joy and so alter my desire. As Spinoza suggests at 3p12, I will strive to imagine what brings about such a change: now, in order to continue to hear the music, I turn from the library to the pub. When I sit in the pub, though, Eurovision appears on the television, causing sadness. As Spinoza suggests at 3p13, I now do whatever I can to remove the corporeal image and the correlate idea: I turn away. Turning away, though, produces a new experience and with it, it is likely, a new desire. As Spinoza writes in summarizing his view (3p59s): “From what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate.” The continually changing influence of external objects on us in experience makes it difficult for us to lead our own lives, and even those objects that bring us joy contribute to this condition.

Spinoza builds directly upon *Ethics* 2 theses about imagination in arguing about the ways in which we are driven about by external objects. These include accounts of the place of the association of ideas and vacillation in human passions. In a basic case of the association of ideas, one experience of two objects together will bring a mind, upon a new experience of one of the objects, to expect the other (2p18). For example, because Wodehouse’s Bertie sees Dahlia with Anatole once, seeing Dahlia

again will bring Anatole to mind. As Spinoza applies this doctrine at 3p14—incorporating, for the first and only time, the definition of “affect” in corporeal terms at 3d3—it is a mechanism by which passion can be reignited or transferred. Even if it is Anatole that inspired gluttony in Bertie in the first instance, another experience of Dahlia will, by the same mechanism, reignite this gluttony in Bertie (3p14). A broadening of this view, which does not have a clear precedent in the *Ethics* 2 account of association, is the 3p16 claim that the experience of an object that is *like* another object of experience can bring that second object, and associated passions, to mind. As a consequence of these doctrines on which we come to associate passions with objects that do not, in the first instance, cause them, Spinoza argues that “any thing can be the accidental cause of joy, sadness, or desire” (3p15).

Vacillation arises as a result of complex associations of ideas in the account of *Ethics* 2. Dahlia is not always with Anatole, and Bertie encounters her also with Agatha. Thus, in seeing Dahlia again, Bertie may vacillate between expecting Anatole and Agatha (2p44s). Likewise, if he fears Agatha but loves Anatole, he may now fear and love Dahlia (3p17s).

Because imagination is always of a thing “as present” and changes with respect to imagined time only insofar as the mind associates the object with a past or future time (2p44s), affects of joy and sadness will not vary with respect to time either (3p18). If Bertie fears Agatha, that affect will associate also with any imagination of Agatha in the past or future. Spinoza does, however, offer labels to distinguish varieties of passions related to vacillation and time from those related to certainty and the present (3p18s2), and he goes on to argue that the power of a given affect can vary with the representation of its object as contingent, possible, past, or future (4p9–4p13, see §4.2).

Further prominent theses about imagination among these propositions also depend upon earlier views about imagination, but incorporate substantively new views about the affects. In discussing them here, I will distinguish between those that concern joy and sadness and those that concern desire. Of joy and sadness, Spinoza maintains, on the basis principally of 3p12 and 3p13, that a mind is sad if what it loves is destroyed (3p19) and that a mind is joyful if what it hates is destroyed (3p20). On the basis of these theses, together with those that draw directly upon the theory

of imagination, Spinoza defends a series of propositions about how the mind responds, affectively, to the external world.

At 3p27, he arrives at a thesis that matters to his accounts of our social nature: “If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect.” The thesis, which Spinoza calls the doctrine of “the imitation of the affects,” derives from our perception of a similarity of nature in bodies like ours, which brings us, so long as we do not already love or hate the other body, to experience the same affects that we take it to experience. This doctrine grounds Spinoza’s accounts of pity (3p27s), ambition (3p29s), and other social passions.

The most general thesis about desire is 3p28: “We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.” This doctrine, which I will call Spinoza’s *psychological hedonism*, depends upon the characterization of striving at 3p12, on which we strive to imagine what increases our power of acting, together with 3p20 and associated theses about what particular sorts of ends these are. Generally, psychological hedonism is the thesis that we only desire pleasure and the avoidance of pain. While Spinoza does not explicitly commit at 3p28 to the view that we *only* seek joy and avoid sadness, he uses 3p28 extensively in the *Ethics* and does not appeal to any account of desire that suggests that his hedonism is not comprehensive.

Spinoza’s revisitation of good and evil at 3p39s is some evidence of a further view, *psychological egoism*, the view that we only desire what is in our interest. At 3p9s, recall, Spinoza associates the good with objects of desire: he argues that we judge things good because we desire them. At 3p39s, he refers back to that doctrine in arguing that the good is every kind of joy. If we only desire joy, then perhaps, by these doctrines, we also only desire what we judge to be good. If, further, we conceive of the good in terms of our own interest, as perhaps 1 Appendix suggests, then there is reason to consider Spinoza to be a psychological egoist.

Most propositions about imagination and the affects between 3p28 and 3p50 are definitions of and theses about particular affects. Spinoza emphasizes hate, love, hope, and fear. These further theses are nearly all consequences of 3p13 directly, the doctrine of the imitation of the affects at 3p27, or the doctrine of psychological hedonism at 3p28.

3.3.1 What Are the Objects of Conscious Desire?

As we have seen (§2.3.2), Spinoza's views about consciousness generally are a challenge to understand. In addition to uncertainty about what those views are, there is some reason to think that they do not matter to understanding his theory of desire: Spinoza expresses, at least in some contexts, the view that the distinction between what we are conscious of in striving and striving itself is of little importance (3defaff1exp). Nevertheless, for understanding characterizations of ordinary experience and value in the *Ethics*, an account of what, on Spinoza's view, people consciously desire may be indispensable. Normative ethics, at least as it is frequently understood, is a body of knowledge that we offer to others or apply in our own lives in order to improve ourselves and, notably, to improve what we consciously try to do in acting. For that project—and, looking forward, the theory of good and evil is perhaps the central project of *Ethics* 4—it is necessary to consider Spinoza's views about conscious desire.

For example, suppose that, in virtue of his striving doctrine, Spinoza takes it to be a fixed fact about human nature that everybody in all of their actions consciously gives preservation of their own being the highest priority: I always consciously desire, more than anything else, to preserve my own being; you always consciously desire, more than anything else, to preserve your own being; and so on. Even if, on Spinoza's view, it would be better to prioritize some other end, there would be, given human psychology, no point in recommending that we do so. Likewise, if self-preservation really were the most valuable end, there would still be no point in recommending that we prioritize it: we already do. Spinoza, however, does in his ethics make a point of recommending this end: “[reason] demands that . . . everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can” (4p18s). To attribute to Spinoza a theory on which striving reflects itself in conscious desire in this way would be to render this recommendation pointless.

The *Ethics* does include some passages that suggest that people at least ordinarily consciously want something like what is good for them. For example, at 1 Appendix, Spinoza writes, “[men] all want to seek their own advantage, and are conscious of this appetite.” Other passages suggest, however, that Spinoza acknowledges a wide variety of human ends. At

3p39s, for example, Spinoza writes that the greedy judge money best and poverty worst, whereas the ambitious desire esteem and dread shame above all else. Indeed, 3p50 suggests that human beings might hope for anything or fear anything, a doctrine that implies that we might also desire anything or be averse to anything. By 3p9s, of course, they will judge anything good that they desire, but there is a difference between what I judge good and what is good for me.

That is why I find psychological hedonism to be the best general characterization of Spinoza's theory of conscious desire. On this view, which Spinoza expresses most clearly at 3p28, I consciously desire anything that I associate with joy and I am consciously averse to anything that I associate with sadness. This proposition, as stated, is not a comprehensive theory of desire: Spinoza does not claim that I do not also desire other things. The "rash desires" of 4p15–4p17 (see §4.2 and §4.2.1), which may have little conscious awareness to them, are I think the best candidates for exceptions to psychological hedonism (although I remain unsure whether they are). Nearly all other desires clearly do fall under the scope of 3p28. It is not clear that the greedy or ambitious take their ends to constitute or to be means to their own interests, but it is clear that they associate those ends with joy. "To the envious," Spinoza writes for example in the same scholium, "nothing is more agreeable than another's unhappiness." Desires continue to vary across those who are influenced by different passions. It seems that, whereas the judgment that a desired end is good arises from the desire rather than explaining it, the association of end with joy motivates the pursuit of that end and so does explain the desire.

Joy and sadness, as primitive passions, relate to the striving to persevere in being, by 3p11 and 3p11s. When I experience joy, I strive with greater power or am more perfect. When I experience sadness, I strive with less power or am less perfect. When I consciously pursue joy in some end, then, I pursue a thing that, if I attain it (that is, actually attain joy in that end), will bring me to strive with greater power. I am not pursuing perseverance in being explicitly and consciously. Rather I operate on a kind of mechanism that, when it works, does make me more able to persevere in being. I strive to persevere in being by consciously seeking joy and consciously avoiding sadness.

The mechanism is imperfect. It may be that the end I seek does not in fact bring joy when I attain it, or it may be that some other end would have

brought more joy. Spinoza's distinction between pleasure and pain (affects related to one part of me more than the rest), on the one hand, and cheerfulness and melancholy (affects related to all parts equally), on the other, makes this second possibility particularly salient: I frequently have desires and aversions that relate more closely to some part of me than to the whole. Finally, and most important, I may not be aware of the fundamental truth about the affects: the very fact that the conscious experience of these affects correlates with these changes in power. Unless I know that joy just is an increased power to persevere in being, my pursuit of joy is haphazard.

While it is not true that all people consciously seek to preserve themselves on Spinoza's account, this mechanism explains the prominent place that preservation does play in his account of desire. Once any person possesses, and is motivated by, the basic information that joy correlates with perseverance, Spinoza's psychological hedonism will guarantee that that person will consciously associate greater perseverance with joy and so will seek it. This explains, I think, why Spinoza makes it a command of reason to preserve one's being. Spinoza makes it a basic demand of practical rationality that one should preserve one's being, I think, just because the correlation between joy and perseverance is a critical piece of self-knowledge that those who are less than fully rational may lack or fail to appreciate. On my view, then, he is well-regarded as a psychological hedonist and an ethical egoist.

3.3.2 Can the Doctrine of the Imitation of Affects Explain Human Sociability?

At 3p27, Spinoza argues that, in many circumstances, we will come to have the same affects as those of other human beings that we encounter: "If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect." As the qualification, "toward which we have had no affect," suggests, Spinoza does not maintain that one human being's affects will imitate the affects of *any* other human being that she encounters. Notably, Spinoza adds at the end of 3p27dem, if we hate something like us, "we shall be affected with an affect contrary to its affect, not like it." Broadly, however, this doctrine of the imitation of the affects may seem to provide a basis for something like

social emotions. Accounts of such emotions—pity, emulation, and benevolence—follow in scholia and corollaries to 3p27.

If the basis for a theory of desire in the striving for perseverance suggests to some readers an implausibly egoistic theory of human nature, these doctrines may soften the impression. Spinoza's invocation of imagination at 3p27 indicates that all of these affects are passions and inadequate ideas. Notably, Spinoza argues later that, as a form of sadness, pity is, in itself, "evil and useless" (4p50). However, pity can, despite its intrinsic evil, be an instrumental good. Perhaps, for example, my pity can work against a more dangerous passion such as anger or fear in a given case. If plausibility requires that pity be, on some occasions, in itself good and fully rational, then the doctrine of the imitation of the affects cannot make Spinoza's theory plausible. Perhaps, however, the instrumental value of pity and similar affects suffices and makes Spinoza's an attractive view of the social passions.

The most general account of other-regarding desire in the *Ethics* is 4p37: "The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater." The proposition invokes many notions central to *Ethics* 4, and I discuss it below (§4.3). Nevertheless, here, for the purpose of showing the role of the imitation of the affects in the *Ethics*, I note that 4p37 has two demonstrations. These two demonstrations do not prove the same thing. Instead, they are supplementary. The first invokes reasons that we have desiring the good for others and therefore is not related to passion. The alternate demonstration invokes the doctrine of the imitation of the affects (3p27 by way of 3p31 and 3p31c) in order to find a basis in passion for such desire. Thus, both reason and passion can bring us to seek the same goods for others that we desire for ourselves. These two bases anticipate, I think, the kingdoms of philosophy and theology that together form the basis for society in the TTP. Indeed Spinoza's account of the state in the *Ethics* follows in a scholium to 4p37.

This prominence of the imitation of the affects in Spinoza's argument makes its interpretation more pressing. The doctrine, however, incorporates many of the most difficult notions in the *Ethics*—notably, the egoistic theory of individual natures, theories of imagination and representation, and, because, we may be more or less like others, incrementalism—and critics have found it puzzling.

To consider imagination, I think that 3p27 suggests that we imitate affects based upon what we imagine only. Suppose that Auerbach's Frau Ufmsand encounters Olympia on the street and imagines Olympia to be like herself and to love Benedict. By 3p31 and 3p27, I think, Ufmsand will thereby love Benedict. What does 3p27 imply, however, if Ufmsand is mistaken in taking herself to be like Olympia? Will imitation of the affects not kick in because they are not alike? There is some evidence (4p68s) that suggests that the true nature of what is imagined does not matter. The demonstration to 3p27 and related texts is, however, not entirely clear. Nor is it clear how or to what extent Spinoza's theory of imagination at 2p17s could support this view (see §§2.2–2.3 above). It may be—perhaps 2p38 and 2p39 suggest this—that Spinoza takes there to be systematic relations between the natures of things and how they might be misrepresented, such that Ufmsand cannot misrepresent Olympia in some salient respects.

Spinoza's emphasis on humanity in the doctrine of the imitation of the affects also raises hard questions. His incrementalism and naturalism suggest that I will be more or less like other human beings but also more or less like other things in nature. Perhaps I am completely similar to other human beings insofar as I act (see 4p35 and §3.2.2). Although passions are on Spinoza's account the source of difference among human beings, it may also be that I can be similar to other human beings insofar as I am passionate. Spinoza argues, after all, that human passions differ from the passions of other species (3p57s). A complete account of the role of the doctrine of the imitation of the affects in Spinoza's theories of society and the state must first arrive at a clear interpretation of the doctrine where Spinoza introduces it at 3p27–3p31s.

3.3.3 Does Spinoza Offer a Theory of Value in *Ethics* 3?

In a scholium to 3p9, recall, Spinoza writes that we do not strive for things because we judge them to be good; rather we judge them good because we strive for them. Referring to this claim at 3p39s, Spinoza expands upon it:

By good here I understand every kind of joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be. And by evil [I understand here] every kind of sadness, and especially what frustrates longing. For we have shown above (in 3p9s) that we desire nothing because we judge it to be good, but on the contrary, we call it good because we desire it. Consequently, what we are averse to we call evil. (3p39s)

Spinoza's reference to 3p9s and the context of this scholium both make it clear that he draws upon people's experience of value and their use of value terms in this new discussion of good and evil. The opening of this passage, however, raises the question of whether Spinoza also understands the terms in this way. Does the passage amount to a definition of "good" as every kind of joy, whatever leads to it, and whatever satisfies any kind of longing, or is this merely a theory of the ordinary use of value terms, that is, a theory about the sorts of things that people call good?

The difficult opening of the scholium, "By good here I understand . . .," (*Per bonum hic intelligo . . .*) looks like a definition, and Spinoza frequently uses a similar phrase in introducing formal definitions at the beginning of the first four parts of the *Ethics*: "*Per x and such intelligo . . .*" The small qualification, "here," (*hic*) may matter, however. Spinoza is describing ordinary practice and the objects of our desires at 3p39, and "here" restricts his account of the good to those contexts: by 3p39, we typically try to do evil to people that we hate in the sense that we try to frustrate their desires and, generally, to make them sad (a bad practice, perhaps, but hatred is an inadequate idea). Spinoza does not similarly qualify his formal definitions in the *Ethics*.

The discussion in 3p39s that follows makes it clear that Spinoza does not necessarily understand good and evil just as what he takes people to judge good and evil. His examples of judgments of good or evil that conform to the 3p39s account all concern people who are motivated by passionate desires: the greedy person finds money good; the ambitious person finds esteem good; and the envious finds another's unhappiness good. If this were his own account of the good, then Spinoza would make a point of showing that virtuous people use the terms in these senses and that those overcome by inadequate ideas differ.

The challenge that 3p39s poses for the interpretation of Spinoza's theory of value is that, even if this theory of use does characterize what people, including those motivated by powerful passions, call good, it seems nevertheless to be a comprehensive theory. By 3p9s, we all judge good whatever we desire, and by 3p39s we all judge good whatever brings us joy. This practice seems, on the account of the *Ethics*, to be a fixed fact about human nature. If this is correct, then, whatever formal definition of "good" Spinoza does endorse will have either to accommodate this fact about our

use—such that whatever really is good is also really an object of desire or an object in which we take joy—or risk irrelevance to human practice.

While understanding the relation between use and meaning is a challenge, taking 3p39s as a universal theory of use alone does allow us to find in Spinoza, in addition, a theory of what the good means. *Ethics* 1 appendix shows that Spinoza acknowledges a distinction between the contexts in which people use value terms and what they take those terms to mean. There, ordinary people judge and call good whatever is to their advantage. The same people, however, understand by “good,” when they use that label, “whatever conduces to health and the worship of God” (G2/81). There is room, then, looking forward to 4d1, for an account of what one really ought to understand by “good” even if one’s use of the term conforms to 3p39s. The definition, so understood, represents neither a change in Spinoza’s theory of our use of value terms nor a recommendation to change what cannot be changed. Rather, it is an effort to correct the ordinary misunderstanding of what the good is. On this issue, it may be useful to compare Spinoza to his contemporary, Hobbes, who offers (*Leviathan*, Chapter 6) similar theories of use but seems simply to take the theories at the same time to amount to accounts of the meaning of value terms.

3.4 Causation and Human Affects: 3p51–3p59

In the final propositions of *Ethics* 3, Spinoza introduces particular affects—wonder, self-esteem, and active forms of desire and joy—that hold roles central to his theology, ethics, and eschatology. He also defends a general account of human passion that emphasizes the particularity of the causal circumstances in which passions arise. Views earlier in *Ethics* 3 anticipate some aspects of these doctrines. For example, Spinoza’s account of wonder depends heavily, although in a different way, on the same views—2p18 and the association of ideas—that serve as a basis for 3p14–3p16. Spinoza’s presentation of the activity and passivity of the human mind in the opening elements of *Ethics* 3 suggests both that passions will be particular to a person’s causal circumstances and also that some desires, at least, will be active. Nevertheless, these views do not depend significantly on many of the propositions after 3p29. As far as Spinoza’s argument requires, many of them might have appeared earlier in *Ethics* 3. Our lack of knowledge of the

details of Spinoza's composition of the *Ethics* makes this a matter of conjecture, but I think that Spinoza's placement of these doctrines at the end of *Ethics* 3 indicates their importance to views to follow in the *Ethics* and to the TTP.

Wonder itself is not an affect in the strict sense of 3d3 because (by 3post1) the power of a mind need not change in the experience of wonder. Instead, it is Spinoza's label for a particularly persistent kind of imaginative idea. As we have seen, many of Spinoza's propositions about the passions depend upon the doctrine of the association of ideas. Suppose that I have experienced a given object, A, with another given object, B, or—now in the broadened sense of 3p16—suppose that the given object resembles a second object. By the doctrine of the association of ideas, if my mind should come again to consider A, it will move quickly to B, and, if the imaginative idea of A accompanied a certain passion, the imaginative idea of B will as well (see §3.3 above). We wonder, by 3p52s, whenever we experience something unique, that is, something that we do *not* associate with any other object in either of these ways. Spinoza argues on the basis of 2p18 at 3p52 that, if there is no associative path by which the mind will move from A to B, it will simply continue to consider A.

Although it is not always an affect, forms of wonder include varieties of joy and sadness (3p52s). Just as ideas in which we wonder stand to be particularly powerful ideas, because we will consider them for a longer time, so passionate forms of wonder stand to be particularly powerful affects. In the TTP, Spinoza takes one of these forms, devotion, to be a particularly powerful religious passion, and he takes wonder to give religion a power against opposed affects similar to that of the power of reason.

Discussions of passions associated with wonder (3p52) and with the contemplation of ourselves (3p51s, 3p53–3p55, discussed below) complete Spinoza's formal presentation of particular passions. General propositions at the end of this presentation qualify the labels that Spinoza gives different groups of passions by emphasizing the ways in which all passions vary from one another (3p51, 3p56, 3p57). These propositions emphasize the particular causal circumstances of passion. The complexity of the human body (2a1) is such that the same object can affect different human beings differently and even the same human being differently at different times (3p51). Moreover, because our bodies differ in many ways, my joy differs from your joy; my sadness differs from your sadness; and, most important,

because desire associates closely with individual essence (3p9s), my desire differs from your desire (3p57). Finally, because external objects cause passions in us, there will be as many different kinds of passions as there are different kinds of objects (3p56). Collectively, these propositions suggest that, although traditional labels for passions (such as “pity,” “hope,” “anger,” “cheerfulness,” and so on) can be helpful shorthand, a detailed understanding of any particular passion requires an understanding of the particular person, the particular external object, and the particular interaction. While it can be useful, again, in thinking about ways to mitigate bondage to passion, to consider opposed kinds of affects—and, as we will see, Spinoza does this in *Ethics* 4 and 5—this detailed account of the ways in which passions arise suggests that the mitigation of any case of passion may pose a peculiar challenge.

A particularly prominent single object that affects the human mind in different ways is the human self (3p51s). In arguing that self-esteem and repentance are powerful, Spinoza notes their prominence in the *Ethics* 3 account of desire and imagination. It is from our judgments that given objects will bring joy or sadness to us that we desire or are averse to them, so we ourselves are frequently the objects of our practical thought. Unfortunately, our self-understanding, Spinoza emphasizes, is typically highly inadequate (see §2.3). Propositions 53–55 offer detailed theses about the passions that we have in imaginative self-understanding.

The final propositions of Spinoza’s account of the affects build upon this account of self-esteem in order to argue that the mind also has active affects, that is, affects in virtue of its actions as an adequate cause or (by 3p3) from its adequate ideas. In considering ourselves, we can consider our power, which brings us joy (3p53) or our lack of power (3p55), which brings repentance. Our joy is passive to the extent that we imagine our power inadequately. However, because we act insofar as we have adequate ideas (3p3, again, and 3p9) and because we know our adequate ideas (2p43), we also have adequate knowledge of our power, and the self-esteem that we have in this knowledge is wholly active.

Because of the prominence of self-esteem in these propositions, they may seem to be part of an egoistic doctrine. To be sure, they are in some way, and understanding precisely how Spinoza is an egoist is a central aim of the interpretation of his psychology and ethics. The doctrine of 2p43, on which we know when our ideas are adequate, suggests that Spinoza’s

egoism is less self-centered than it might initially appear. Our ideas just are elements of our own minds. Active self-esteem, then, is taking joy in oneself insofar as one has knowledge. Because knowledge can have many objects, however, egoism so understood reaches well beyond any focus on the self to the exclusion of other things. A form of active desire that Spinoza introduces at 3p59s, and that figures prominently in *Ethics* 5 (see §5.2), helps to demonstrate this reach. While tenacity is an active desire to strive to persevere in being and so may seem narrowly egoistic, nobility is an active desire to aid others. Both desires alike arise from reason and, therefore, from the sort of self-esteem that Spinoza describes at 3p58.

3.4.1 What Is the Place of Wonder in Spinoza's Theory of the Affects?

Scholars frequently compare the account of the passions in *Ethics* 3 to Descartes's *Passions of the Soul*, a Latin translation of which Spinoza owned. For the case of wonder, the comparison is particularly revealing. At the beginning of his enumeration of the passions, Descartes lists wonder, and he makes it one of the primitive six passions. Unlike other passions, wonder does not, for Descartes, motivate action. Instead, in presenting something novel to the mind, wonder is a passion that fixes an impression on us (*Passions of the Soul* 2.53–2.73).

On a first reading, Spinoza's incorporation of wonder at the end of *Ethics* 3 is mysterious. While Spinoza's primitive affects and his order of presentation generally resemble Descartes's, he omits wonder at 3p11s. If he were following Descartes closely, Spinoza would seem, then, already to have omitted wonder from his account of the affects. Where Spinoza eventually describes wonder at 3p52, he also goes on to define it together with associated passions in a scholium. Both accounts, again, seem fairly similar to Descartes's account of wonder. Even then, however, the concept seems to disappear in the *Ethics*. Spinoza refers to wonder and the passions again in his definitions of the affects—where, adding to the mystery, it resumes its Cartesian place near the front of the account, at 3defaff4—but otherwise he only refers to any of the related notions in the *Ethics* again in a scholium a few propositions later, 3p55cs, where he argues that veneration—wonder with love—of another person does not include envy. In short, if Spinoza initially seems to omit wonder from his account of the affects,

there also seems to be little use made of the theory of wonder once he does present it.

Perhaps Spinoza addresses wonder just for the sake of giving a complete and better account of a passion that matters to Descartes. Spinoza's theories of imagination and the association of ideas (see §2.2 above) do supply an interesting explanation for the peculiar power of an idea of a unique thing. As Spinoza argues in the demonstration to 3p52, if I have not experienced a thing before at all, then I do not associate it with anything else and will not be led from the consideration of the unique thing to something else: I will continue to regard the wondrous object as present. Descartes offers a compelling introspective account of wonder at *Passions* 2.53, and he also makes wonder an unusually powerful psychological state. Spinoza may have felt, however, that, burdened as Descartes is by his theory of the pineal gland, the theory of imagination in the *Ethics* offers a better explanation of the staying power of wonder.

It may also be that Spinoza recognized, in wonder, an opportunity to ground his views about religion in his psychology. Spinoza's accounts of prophecy, scripture, and miracles in chapters 2 and 6 of the TTP emphasize wonder and the associated affects of devotion and reverence. Note that miracle (*miraculum*) and wonder (*admiratio*) are closely related terms in Latin, such that what one wonders at is a miracle. Spinoza claims, eventually, that religion can rival reason as a powerful idea that can lead to cooperation in states (TTP 15). In his psychology, the ideas that motivate religion, varieties of wonder, have a striking similarity to ideas of reason. Ideas of miracles are always present to mind because the mind associates nothing else with them. Ideas of reason—at least the common notions—are always present to mind because they are ideas of properties in every object of present sensation. This similarity may give the very different ideas—ideas of reason are adequate but ideas of miracles are perhaps the most irrational ideas—similar powers to motivate people and so explain Spinoza's account of the place of religion in the state.

The TTP and the *Ethics* are different sorts of projects with different audiences. Any thesis, like this one, that suggests some kind of doctrinal continuity between the works faces the challenge of explaining why Spinoza would be (apparently) consistent in some respects and (apparently) inconsistent in others (see §1.4.2 above). My own view is that Spinoza's understanding of human nature in the TTP is informed by his account of

human nature in the *Ethics*. Thus an understanding of the way that wonder motivates us based upon an interpretation of the *Ethics* can contribute to an interpretation of Spinoza's accounts of prophecy, scripture, and miracles in the TTP.

3.4.2 How Can Spinoza Explain Desire and Joy?

The relation between a person's power and her passions founds Spinoza's account of the affects. Spinoza suggests in the opening of *Ethics* 3 that any affect is a change in a body's power of acting or the idea of that change (3d3; see also the "General Definition of the Affects" G2/203–G2/204); that joy just is a change to me in which I become more powerful; and that sadness just is a change to me in which I become less powerful (3p11 and 3p11s). These views seem to ground Spinoza's theory of the affects in his theory of causation, so they promise continuity and coherence in the doctrines of the *Ethics*. It is not clear, however, that they deliver on this promise.

Desire, on Spinoza's account, just is striving together with consciousness of striving (3p9s). Desire is also, however, a primitive affect. If all affects are changes in my power of acting, the characterization of desire as an affect seems to make desire, improbably, a change to itself. This may be simply a slip on Spinoza's part: perhaps he should not have made desire an affect after all. Alternatively, it may reflect some commitment in his theory of desire; for example, that desire always accompanies and it is not really distinct from some form of joy or sadness. On this view, I cannot strive to persevere without at the same time experiencing an ongoing change to my striving to persevere.

A similar problem that arises for Spinoza's psychological hedonism suggests, I think, that the classification of desire as an affect is not merely a slip. By his psychological hedonism, Spinoza maintains that I only desire to attain objects that I associate with joy or to avoid objects that I associate with sadness. Desire just is my striving to persevere in being, and, again, joy and sadness are changes to the power to strive. Therefore, by psychological hedonism, I strive to persevere only by striving to increase my power to persevere or by striving to avoid decreasing that power. The end of desire, as well as desire itself, emphasizes change in power. There is, then, a consistent emphasis on change in Spinoza's conative theory. On the

face of it, the emphasis is problematic: is it not possible that, as when a restaurateur opens one restaurant too many, a person risks perseverance in being, in some cases, by seeking to increase her power?

Spinoza's accounts of joy arising in passion also present problems. I act, by 3p1, only insofar as I have adequate ideas; joy is an affect in which I become more active (3d3, 3p11, 3p11s); it would seem, then, that joy is an affect in which I acquire new adequate ideas; but any passion is an inadequate idea. How can I acquire new adequate ideas in acquiring inadequate ideas?

The problem of passive joy might be mitigated somewhat by appeal to the doctrine on which some forms of joy, forms of pleasure, are changes to a part of the body. Such passions can help us instrumentally, by working against harmful passions that also affect parts of the body, instances of pain, and so make us more powerful by decreasing respects in which we are less powerful. Indeed, forms of sadness can also help us by means of this sort of mechanism (4p43). This cannot be the whole solution, however. Even if it does affect one part of the body more than others, joy, Spinoza maintains, is always, considered in itself, good for the whole (4p41). Moreover, there is a form of joy, cheerfulness, that influences the body as a whole (3p11s).

To my knowledge, scholars have not been similarly concerned about active joy. Here also, however, I think that Spinoza's view raises hard questions. How does a thing act on itself to make itself more powerful? The doctrine of striving relies for its plausibility on Cartesian intuitions about inertia: just as a moving thing tends to continue its motion, so an existing thing will tend to stay in existence unless something external interferes with it. That intuitive appeal is lost in the theory of active joy: a moving stone of its own accord does not become more powerful.

Perhaps, put in epistemological terms, the theory of active joy can be understood. Once again, by 3p1, I act only insofar as I have adequate ideas. Therefore, I will become more powerful only if I acquire new adequate ideas. How, though, will I acquire new adequate ideas through action on myself? Typically, I acquire such ideas in sensation, by 2p38, but I can also do so, 2p40 and 2p47s suggest, by working from the adequate ideas that I have to form new adequate ideas. Spinoza associates different kinds of active joy, eventually, with different kinds of adequate ideas (5p31–5p33, 5p38), so a comprehensive approach to this question should consider both reason and intuition.

Recommended Reading

- Carriero, John. 2017. "Conatus." In *Spinoza's Ethics. A Critical Guide*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed, 142–168. Cambridge Critical Guides. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Clear, well-defending account of striving in Spinoza.)
- Douglas, Alexander. 2015. "Was Spinoza a Naturalist?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 96 (1): 77–99. (A provocative challenge to the widely accepted (and correct!) answer to this question.)
- Garrett, Don. 2002. "Spinoza's Conatus Argument." In *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, edited by Olli Koistinen and John Biro, 127–158. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Reprinted in *Nature and Necessity*. (A teleological reading of 3p6.)
- Hobbes, Thomas. 2012. *Leviathan*. Edited by Noel Malcolm. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (This is the critical edition of work available in many editions. See Chapter 6 for accounts of striving, good, and evil.)
- Hübner, Karolina. 2016. "Spinoza on Essences, Universals, and Beings of Reason." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97 (1): 58–88. (Helpful essay, including an innovative account of human essence.)
- James, Susan. 1999. *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth Century Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Helpful comparative study of theories in Spinoza and his near contemporaries.)
- Quine, Willard. 1969. "Epistemology Naturalized." In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, 69–90. New York: Columbia University Press. (A formative essay for epistemology and principal source of contemporary understandings of naturalism.)
- Steinberg, Justin. 2013. "Imitation, Representation, and Humanity in Spinoza's Ethics." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51 (3): 383–407. (An excellent recent study of sociality and the affects.)
- Youpa, Andrew. 2020. *The Ethics of Joy: Spinoza on the Empowered Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (An important new study, which includes a detailed, well-referenced interpretation of 3p39s.)

Spinoza in Literature

- Auerbach, Berthold. 1882. *Spinoza: A Novel*. Translated by E. Nicholson. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Wodehouse, P. G. 2008. *Joy in the Morning*. London: Arrow Books.

4

Bondage to Passion

As its title, “Of Human Bondage,” suggests, *Ethics* 4 emphasizes human limitation and the threat of harmful passions. Those who know the good and pursue it may simply be unable to attain it, of course, because they are too weak to do what they need to do. This is not a function of passion but simply of our limitations as finite things. Passions, which give rise to desire, offer more subtle threats. They can harm us in the most simple cases by weakening us, when they are forms of sadness. Sadness and also passive joy can, in addition, motivate us to pursue ends that are not worthwhile. One might hope that knowledge of what is truly good for us might redress this harm. Spinoza argues, however, that even after we come to know the good, our weakness and vulnerability to passion continue to compromise our ability to benefit from that knowledge. Frequently powerful passions motivate us, although we know better, to act in self-destructive ways.

Even as Spinoza paints this dark picture of the human condition, however, he offers some prospect of mitigation. He introduces formal definitions of “good,” “evil,” and “virtue” at the beginning of *Ethics* 4; offers an account of the highest human good (4p28); and offers a number of particular claims about the value of actions and human states. Given Spinoza’s determinism and necessitarianism, these claims are difficult to interpret, but they seem at least on the face of it to be a normative, even a prescriptive, ethics. Although we face a steep challenge in human bondage, they suggest, there are measures that we can take to improve our lives.

From 4 Preface through 4p7, Spinoza offers broad accounts of the human good and the problem of bondage. The preface is principally an account of the role of exemplars in ordinary understanding. From that account, and his understanding of the ordinary use of value terms, Spinoza builds formal definitions of “good” and “evil” based on an exemplar, a model of human nature, at 4d1 and 4d2. He adds a definition of “virtue” at 4d8, which he equates with power. This last definition offers a rich connection between this new understanding of good and evil and a central

concept from earlier in the *Ethics*: the model of human nature will be the most powerful human being, and the good is what helps a given person to approach nearer to that model, that is, to become more powerful. The other definitions and the opening propositions of *Ethics* 4 comprise a general account of the challenge that the passions present to our efforts to become more powerful.

The propositions that follow, 4p8–4p28, concern good, evil, and knowledge. Drawing upon his formal definitions of “good” and “evil,” Spinoza describes good and evil in human awareness at 4p8. That proposition, which is difficult but also frequently cited in arguments that follow, may promise a means by which the knowledge of goods and evils can help us to resist harmful passion. Spinoza goes on to offer a number of theses about the ways in which the passions influence us and a general account, informed by 4p8, of the human good as what helps us to preserve ourselves. It turns out that what helps us most, on Spinoza’s view, is knowledge. Spinoza argues at 4p28 that the knowledge of God is the mind’s highest good.

The rest of *Ethics* 4 offers accounts of the value of particular states, ends, and actions. From 4p29–4p37 Spinoza emphasizes the value that human beings promise for one another. The scholia to 4p37 include a brief social contract theory that may be compared usefully to the TTP and the TP. Further theses of normative ethics—which Spinoza presents variously as commands of reason, goods and evils, elements of virtue, or, returning perhaps to the exemplar of 4 Preface, characteristics of the free man—follow from 4p38–4p73. This chapter includes sections on each of these four groups of elements.

An appendix following *Ethics* 4 is notable, especially, for the eloquent account of the value of knowledge that Spinoza offers in its first four entries. It is frequently useful as a resource for understanding difficult claims that Spinoza makes in the course of his formal presentation. That is how I will use it here.

4.1 Good, Evil, and the Problem of Bondage: 4 Preface to 4p7

In the preface to *Ethics* 4, Spinoza describes two errors that human beings ordinarily, even systematically, commit. Then, surprisingly, he commits to related doctrines that may seem to incorporate one of them. The errors are,

first, taking natural things to be more or less perfect and, second, taking them to be inherently good or evil. In the preface, Spinoza introduces the model of human nature. It at least seems as though Spinoza commits an error of the first sort in this view: as we have seen (§3.1), Spinoza insists that human beings are natural things, and this model seems to be a conception of the most perfect such being. Spinoza's formal definitions of "good" (4d1) and "evil" (4d2) in terms of that model do not, I think, reproduce the second error. Things are not, on these definitions, good or evil in themselves. Rather, they are good or evil insofar as they move us closer to or further from the model.

Spinoza dedicates the bulk of the preface to a description and criticism of ordinary understandings of perfection and imperfection. Human beings, he argues, frequently evaluate the things that we design—houses are Spinoza's principal example (G2/206–G2/207)—by reference to the plan that we have in mind. Thus a house is more or less perfect to the extent that it is more or less like the blueprint that we have drawn of it. We become so accustomed to thinking this way that we take things that we have *not* designed also to be more or less perfect to the extent that they are more or less like what we take their exemplars to be. We will then, erroneously, take nature to fail or succeed in the construction, for example, of a tree, just as we take ourselves to fail or succeed in the construction of a house (G2/206).

The error that we commit in evaluating natural things against exemplars is likely to be exacerbated by the fact that we commonly derive the exemplars from universals that are themselves highly imaginative and flawed (2p40s1). Thus, in my example, I first imagine the perfect tree by drawing upon my imperfect and limited experience of trees and, then, take a given new tree to be a thing that somehow aims at that exemplar and either approaches or falls short of the goal.

The detailed interpretation of Spinoza's account of perfection at 4 Preface turns, then, on several difficult and controversial issues: teleology (see §1.4.1 and §3.2.3) and the status of natural kinds (see §3.2.2). Taking Spinoza to deny any finite teleology and any natural kinds, his view is that we are always wrong to find any natural kinds and that we simply compound our errors in taking a thing's kind also to present a goal for that thing. Taking him to accept one or the other, our error may not necessarily be compounded in this way. On any of these interpretations, Spinoza certainly maintains that ordinary people typically misapply the language of

perfection to natural things and do so against the background of a misunderstanding of those things.

The second error, which Spinoza describes in a single paragraph near the end of the preface, is in taking good (or, similarly, evil) to be properties of a thing rather than relations between one thing and another for whom the first thing is good. I may say, for example, that apples are good, taking goodness, like being a fruit, to be a property of an apple. In fact, however, on Spinoza's view, if an apple is good, it is good for, or relative to, someone or something. Thus, Spinoza writes of music: "music is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf" (G2/208).

Spinoza himself brings the good and the notion of an exemplar together in his own, surprising adaptation of these notions. After describing and criticizing the two errors in the preface, Spinoza writes:

But though this is so, still we must retain these words. For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves. (4 Preface)

Why Spinoza feels that we must retain these words is a difficult question. I return to it below (§4.1.1). In the first two definitions of *Ethics* 4, Spinoza defines "good" and "evil" as what we certainly know to be useful or harmful to us and, in an explanation added to the definitions, refers readers back to the preface. After discussions of the ordinary understanding of value terms, at 1app (see §1.4) and 4 Preface, and of the ordinary use of value terms, at 3p9s and 3p39s (see §3.3.3), Spinoza now offers these formal definitions, which must be reconciled with his earlier discussions.

He also offers, at 4d8, a substantial definition of virtue, which associates it with one of the notions central to *Ethics* 3, power:

4d8: By virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is (by 3p7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.

As Spinoza's reference to 3p7 suggests, he associates virtue with an individual's power of acting. To become more virtuous, then, by the account of the affects in *Ethics* 3, is to experience joy (3p11, 3p11s, 3defaff2). If, moreover, the good associates neatly with this account of moral progress,

the good will be what is useful to making us more virtuous or, what is the same thing, to bringing us joy. The model of human nature, it stands to reason, will then be the most virtuous or powerful human being. (Spinoza uses other definitions of *Ethics* 4 infrequently or not at all. I will refer to some of them in §4.2, but pass over them here.)

In a shift from the idealized account of human thriving of the preface and definitions, the axiom and opening propositions present the challenge of our actual circumstances. Spinoza makes it axiomatic that for every singular thing there are other, stronger singular things that can destroy it (4a1). At 4p3, citing 4a1, Spinoza argues that the power of a human being is “infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes.” Because passions are partially caused by external things, our passions express the power of those things (4p5). That is why, by 4p3, our passions can surpass our own power (4p6).

In a little more detail, the cognitive properties of passions complicate Spinoza’s account of bondage. Passions, recall, are inadequate ideas as well as changes to our power. One might have thought, given their inadequacy, that the passions might be redressed by straightforward correction. If my sadness, for example, has led me to desire too much alcohol, one might hope that the knowledge that less alcohol would be better for me will help me to overcome the passion and the associated desire. Perhaps, on Spinoza’s account, it can. Referring back to 2p35 and 2p35s, however, Spinoza reminds readers at 4p1 and 4p1s that human minds can have and show the influence of two ideas of the same object at one time. For example, for a person who views a reflection of the sun in the water, the sun seems to be in the water even if the person knows where it really is (4p1s). Similarly, for the case of affects, it might be that some new, more adequate idea, for example alcohol, can motivate us to act well. An opposed, less adequate idea may nevertheless remain. Moreover, because external things are frequently more powerful than us, the better idea may not give us an impulse as strong as the worse: even knowing that I should drink less, I might continue.

At 4p7 and its corollary, then, Spinoza describes means of overcoming passion. While passions are inadequate ideas, it is not, or not simply, adequate ideas that we require in order to restrain them. Instead, we need opposed, stronger affects. Such affects can accompany adequate ideas: these are the active affects that Spinoza describes at the end of *Ethics* 3. They

may, however, be opposed passions as well. While knowledge might help me to avoid alcohol, the passionate hope for an end to sadness in sobriety might do so as well.

Bondage to passion is a consequence both of our finitude, which makes us vulnerable to destruction by external things, and also of our complexity, which makes it possible for external things to influence us in a great variety of ways. Both of these notions are well-understood in corporeal terms: it is difficult to persevere in a world full of dangers. The complication added by Spinoza's theory of ideas is also necessary. Spinoza has already associated our activity as minds with our adequate ideas (3p1), so his view on which uniformly beneficial affects associate with such ideas is consistent with his psycho-physical account of the human being. The same account does raise hard questions for Spinoza's ethical theory, however. Do human beings become more powerful and more joyful by becoming better persevering bodies, or by coming to be minds that are more knowledgeable, or, somehow, are these one and the same thing?

4.1.1 Why Retain an Exemplar?

Spinoza's own explanation for his retention of a model of human nature is frustratingly brief and uninformative. He simply writes that we desire "to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature." Because we do, he writes of good and evil, "it will be useful to retain these same words." The explanations come after a long and harsh criticism of models. Why not, then, build a theory of value without any model?

One interpretative option, which emphasizes the identification of virtue and power at 4d8, is to take Spinoza simply to empty his models and, consequently, his notions of good and evil, of any genuinely normative or evaluative content. On this view, although we may still use the terms, the notions reduce, really, to descriptive ideas of metaphysics. What we may like to call "virtue" is really only power. Similarly, as Spinoza writes at 2d6 and reiterates at the end of 4 Preface, what we may like to call perfection is just a thing's reality, and what we call "good" is just what makes a person more powerful.

This reductive interpretation is attractive. In addition to its clear textual basis in Spinoza's definitions, it captures a sense in which Spinoza stands by the criticism of 4 Preface: it remains mysterious *why* Spinoza would

want to retain relics of faulty notions, but at least he does not himself use them in an erroneous sense. Instead, he uses them to capture concepts that are meaningful. Finally—and to my eyes this is the most appealing feature of this interpretative strategy—if Spinoza reduces the concepts of good, evil, virtue, and perfection to notions that are not in any genuine sense normative, then his accounts of value in *Ethics* 4 are easily reconcilable with his strong commitments in metaphysics. In various ways, Spinoza's naturalism, determinism, necessitarianism, rejection of free will, and criticism of teleology leave little room for a meaningful ethical doctrine, that is, one that recommends states, ends, and actions. On this reductive interpretation, Spinoza does not have a meaningful ethical doctrine, so readers are relieved of the burden of trying to find such room. This is perhaps what Nietzsche, who himself criticized “good” and “evil” and emphasized power, saw and liked in Spinoza.

The alternative to such reduction, of course, is to read Spinoza as offering some meaningful and distinctive normative doctrines in his accounts of models of human nature, virtue, perfection, good, and evil. On such a view, Spinoza must discard significant, particularly wrong or harmful elements of existing views, but he must also find some element of them that is worth salvaging or correcting. Such interpretations face further difficult questions. How can Spinoza maintain substantive normative doctrines in a manner that is consistent with his metaphysical commitments? Why should he maintain a version of a doctrine that he selects for particular criticism at 4 Preface? They also have the advantage, however, of being able to explain why Spinoza uses “good,” “evil,” “virtue,” and so on in his own formal presentation: these are meaningful concepts in his use, even if the words mean something different from what they mean in ordinary use.

My own view is a strong version of this alternative. I think that Spinoza offers propositions about good, evil, virtue, and perfection that are too rich and too substantive to be part of a fully deflationary conception of ethics. Like most critics who do not take Spinoza's approach to be fully deflationary, I take his concepts to be normative; that is, they provide a standard against which states, actions, and ends may be evaluated. My view is unusually strong in that I also take some of Spinoza's doctrines to be or to imply unqualified prescriptions: they exhort us or tell us what we ought to do.

I face, then, the challenge of explaining why Spinoza retains a model of human nature. My own view about how a reader who finds a genuine normative theory in the *Ethics* should understand the transition from 4 Preface to the definitions of “good” and “evil”—and this is a highly controversial view—is that Spinoza takes some features of our ordinary understanding of value terms to be fixed: while we can and should overcome our views about a providential God (indeed, there is nothing at 1 Appendix to suggest that all of us have such views in the first place), human beings cannot help but understand value in things and in ourselves in terms of good and evil and in terms of models. Because we cannot help but do this (and, of course, if all human beings cannot, then Spinoza also cannot) Spinoza uses models in his accounts of value. He does, however, design a model that conforms to fixed facts about our use of value terms. That is, the model that Spinoza presents in *Ethics* 4 derives from his understanding that we call “good” those things that bring us joy and make us more powerful. His model, then, will be the maximally joyful, maximally powerful human being, and not, for example, the one that is best designed by a creator God.

4.1.2 Does the Initial Account of Bondage Contradict Intellectualism?

Spinoza suggests that the truth of what we believe does not matter to the belief’s affective power:

It happens, of course, when we wrongly fear some evil, that the fear disappears on our hearing news of the truth. But on the other hand, it also happens, when we fear an evil which is certain to come, that the fear vanishes on our hearing false news. So imaginations do not disappear through the presence of the true insofar as it is true, but because there occur others, stronger than them, which exclude the present existence of the things we imagine, as we showed in 2p17. (4p1s)

My fear, on this example, is an inadequate idea in which I anticipate an evil. In order to extinguish this imagination, there must be other ideas that are stronger and that change me such that I no longer regard the evil as present.

Spinoza emphasizes the point that the truth of what I hear is irrelevant: my fear may disappear if you convince me, truthfully, that the evil is not imminent, but it may also disappear if you convince me falsely of the same point. Less explicitly, but more intriguingly, Spinoza refers here to “others” without characterizing them. Read most naturally (*imaginationes. . . aliae*),

the passage suggests that Spinoza takes only an imagination to be capable of extinguishing an imagination. Certainly, given his theory of corporeal imagination, the human body must change its softer surfaces or fluids in some relevant way, and it seems that this could happen in a new imaginative idea. Although central doctrines of 2p6 and 2p7 require that adequate ideas also have corporeal counterparts, it is not clear what Spinoza takes them to be.

Returning to the familiar example of the sun, he makes a similar point. I may overcome the impulse to judge that the sun I see in the sky is near to me, or that the sun I see reflected in the water is in the pond, by knowledge of its distance or its true place. In recounting these examples, however, Spinoza emphasizes that the inadequate, imaginative idea is not removed. This is the point of 4p1: false ideas are not straightforwardly removed by true ideas. Instead, in both cases, the mind has both ideas. Both ideas just are affirmations of their objects. If the idea that is knowledge is stronger, I may act on its basis, but the other idea, and the impulse that it gives me to judge on its basis, remains.

At 4p7 and 4p7c, where Spinoza writes more explicitly about affects, he restates these convictions. He repeatedly writes there about means by which a given affect may be “restrained” (*coerceri*) or “taken away” (*tolli*) by other, stronger affects, but does not insist on the truth of these other ideas. Intellectualism, the value of knowledge to human beings, is a theme of the rest of *Ethics* 4. In the opening propositions, however, Spinoza seems simply to emphasize the power of opposed ideas and to recognize that we may be better served by a powerful false idea than by a weaker, true one. Why, then, should knowledge necessarily be our highest good?

4.2 Knowledge and Power: 4p8–4p28

From 4p8–4p28 Spinoza emphasizes knowledge. The elements that precede Spinoza’s grand claims for the value of knowledge, 4p8–4p17s concern the place of knowledge in human affective psychology. In them, Spinoza offers an account of the good in conscious experience (4p8) and builds to the conclusion that even when we know what is good, we frequently succumb to different sorts of powerful passions (4p14–4p17). Having issued this caveat, Spinoza goes to argue that all understanding is intrinsically valuable (4p26); that understanding and the means to it are the only certain goods

(4p27); and that the knowledge of God is the highest good of the mind (4p28).

Spinoza's formal definition of "good" in terms of what is useful to us in moving toward a model of human nature at 4d1 is an effort to bring us to understand the good in a way that is both adequate and also conforms to our use of the term. We always call things "good" if they bring us joy (3p39s) or, in other words, increase our power (3p11 and 3p11s), and what moves us closer to the most perfect or active human being does bring us joy. Spinoza's contention at 4p8, "the knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an affect of joy or sadness, insofar as we are conscious of it," confirms this association. In defending that claim, he begins by arguing that we call "good" or "evil" what increases or diminishes our power of acting and citing 4d1 and 4d2 in support of that premise. The citation shows, I think, that Spinoza takes whatever is useful to us in moving toward a model of human nature just to be an affect of joy. Once we accept Spinoza's formal definition of "good," our understanding of the term cannot conflict with our use of the term: we know that what, by 3p39s, we call good is good. Spinoza reinforces this point by referring to the doctrine of 4p8 subsequently (for example, 4p14 and 4p15) as "true knowledge" (*vera cognitio*) of the good.

This is not true of what Spinoza takes to be other ordinary understandings of value terms. Suppose that we operated from the 1 Appendix understanding of the good in terms of what God makes well. From that view, we might well theorize about what things are good and might well arrive at a conclusion on which things that give us joy can fail to be good, even while we consistently call them good whenever we encounter them. Our fixed practice would conflict with our theory.

However, Spinoza might, given the various identities in his metaphysics, have offered different formal definitions that also have the advantage of conforming to use. For example, he might have defined the good as what makes us more powerful. In response to this issue, I have argued (§4.1.1) that he defines the good in terms of a model because he takes human beings systematically and always to understand the good in those terms. Just as there are fixed facts about practice, so there are fixed facts about understanding. Spinoza accommodates both at 4d1 and 4d2. However one understands Spinoza's choice of definitions, it remains true that he endorses in them a series of identities: what really moves us toward a model of

human nature just is what makes us more powerful, really preserves us, and brings us joy. Spinoza can refer to the good interchangeably in any of the senses as he proceeds.

From 4p9–4p13 Spinoza offers theses about the strength of different sorts of affects before returning to the question of the relation of the knowledge of good and evil to bondage. Spinoza argues at 4p9 that affects toward objects that we regard as present tend to be more powerful than those toward objects that we regard as absent. He then builds upon 4p9 in arguing that passions toward things we regard as imminent or recent are stronger than those we regard as more remote. The difficult notions of contingency (4d3) and possibility (4d4) add complexity to the account. We tend to feel more strongly about objects that we imagine to be necessary (4p11) than about those that we imagine to be merely possible, but more strongly about these than about what we imagine to be contingent (4p12). Indeed, contingent things seem to inspire affects more weakly even than anything that we regard as present or future (4p12) or past (4p13). All of these propositions include *ceteris paribus* (“other things being equal”) clauses, which I have tried to accommodate in these summaries with the word “tend.”

The distinction between contingency and possibility at 4d3 and 4d4 is a matter of a mind’s attention: a singular thing that we think might exist influences us more, Spinoza argues, if we attend to its causes (and so consider it to be possible by 4d4) than if we attend only to its essence (and so consider it to be contingent by 4d3). What matters, most basically, is the power external things exercise on us, and a more powerful influence—as I read Spinoza at any rate—might always override any of these tendencies. For example, even if we regard a great future evil as contingent and the fear that it inspires is weaker than it might be because of this contingency, the greatness of the evil might nevertheless provoke a fear strong enough to change our behavior.

While these various respects in which affects may be weak offer some promise of overcoming them, Spinoza goes on, from 4p14 to 4p18, to apply versions of most of the same theses to the desires that arise from the true knowledge of good and evil. The result, which is clearest at 4p17s, is that knowledge does not of itself lead to more powerful desire than passion. Rash desires, which apparently arise without the intermediate state of knowledge in some affect, can frequently be more powerful than desires

that arise from knowledge. On Spinoza's view, we are akratic, then, in the sense that we frequently act against our own best judgment.

The scholium to 4p17 marks a turning point in *Ethics* 4. Spinoza has argued up to this point (and emphatically at 4p1s) that knowledge does not help us to resist harmful passion except insofar as it has an affective component, and he has argued that the affective component of knowledge is severely limited (see §4.1.2). After 4p17s, Spinoza turns to knowledge, nevertheless, as the principal source of value. A scholium to 4p18 begins:

With these few words I have explained the causes of man's lack of power and inconstancy, and why men do not observe the precepts of reason. Now it remains for me to show what reason prescribes to us, which affects agree with the rules of human reason, and which, on the other hand, are contrary to those rules. (4p18s)

It seems that, having made sure that readers know that their ability to act from knowledge of the good is severely compromised by passion, Spinoza is now nevertheless ready to offer an account of what such action is. Of course what is good or not for us is in part a function of the ways in which we are and are not able to combat passion. Propositions 9–17 reappear in arguments later in Part 4. In large part, however, the subject of *Ethics* 4 changes after 4p17s from an account of how, even from knowledge, our ability to work against bondage is limited to an account of what, nevertheless, we know to have value.

The foundational arguments for Spinoza's intellectualism that follow draw principally upon the opening propositions of *Ethics* 3. In them, Spinoza emphasizes the value of self-preservation and knowledge. To start with self-preservation, at 4p18s, drawing principally upon the striving doctrine (he cites 3p4), Spinoza argues that the first demand of reason is that "everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can"; that this is the foundation of virtue and happiness; and that those who commit suicide are "completely conquered by external causes." The reference to suicide is important, I think, because it is evidence that Spinoza refers to self-preservation in a straightforward and biological sense. To preserve oneself, the reference suggests, is, most basically, to go on living; to be virtuous is to have the power to go on living; and to be happy is to be able to go on living.

Passages that follow have a similar emphasis. At 4p20, Spinoza argues again that virtue just consists in a person's ability to preserve being and, lest

“being” be misunderstood in some exotic sense, he argues in a scholium that it is those who are completely overwhelmed by external causes that neglect to preserve themselves by avoiding food or killing themselves. At 4p21, he argues—responding to a prompt in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095a)—that no one can desire any further goods without first desiring “to be, to act, and to live, i.e., to exist.” He offers accounts of virtue (4p22, 4p22c, and 4p24) and non-instrumental value (4p25) in similar terms. The arguments for most of these positions continue to emphasize the striving doctrine. Spinoza refers to 3p4, 3p6, and 3p7 in them. The discussion suggests, then, that “perseverance in being” at the beginning of *Ethics* 3 is well-understood as, at least in large part, biological survival.

Turning to intellectualism, the views that culminate with 4p28 rely upon an association of knowledge (*cognitio*) or understanding (*intelligendum*) with preservation. Knowledge, recall (§3.1), is also a theme of the opening of *Ethics* 3, where Spinoza associates the activity of the human mind with its adequate ideas (3p1). At 4p23, Spinoza builds upon 3p1 in identifying virtuous action with action from knowledge: “A man cannot be said absolutely to act from virtue insofar as he is determined to do something because he has inadequate ideas, but only insofar as he is determined because he understands.” This passage, and similarly 4p24, suggests that striving, whatever its end, is not truly virtuous unless it is striving from knowledge.

Other passages associate knowledge not only with the source of virtuous striving but with its end. At 4p26, Spinoza writes that what we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding and that what is useful to the mind is nothing except what leads to understanding. Then he restates the position in the demonstration by characterizing understanding as a complete, or noninstrumental, good: “this striving for understanding is the first and only foundation of virtue, nor do we strive to understand things for the sake of some end (4p25).” At 4p27, Spinoza denies that anything other than understanding is certainly good for us, a position that suggests that there is no complete good that is not understanding. Then, at 4p28, he defends the view that the best among complete goods, the highest good in the traditional Aristotelian vocabulary, is a particular kind of knowledge, the knowledge of God: “Knowledge of God is the mind’s greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God.” Even if the knowledge of good and evil leaves us vulnerable to passions in the ways that 4p14–4p17 describe, knowledge seems

nevertheless to be best good and the only end that is worth seeking for its own sake. Spinoza restates these points emphatically in an appendix to *Ethics* 4:

4app4: In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, *or* reason. In this one thing consists man's highest happiness, *or* blessedness. Indeed, blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God. But perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire, by which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding.

4.2.1 What Do Spinoza's Claims about Akrasia Mean?

Spinoza's account of akrasia is a central element of his theory of bondage: while knowledge may be intrinsically good, it does not always prevail over passion. It also adds to the plausibility of Spinoza's position insofar as many of us take it plainly to be true that human beings do frequently act against their own best judgment. Despite the position's prominence and plausibility, however, Spinoza's presentation of the view from 4p8–4p17 raises several difficult issues.

The most prominent questions concern 4p9's demonstration. It may be plausible to maintain that present temptation, more than any other cause, leads us to act against our best judgment. It is not clear, however, that Spinoza finds a basis in his psychology for this doctrine.

In the demonstration to 4p9, Spinoza draws upon 2p17 in arguing that a given affect is strong when we imagine its causes to be present. Then, he uses the same doctrine to support most of his theory: the demonstrations of 4p9c–4p13 depend directly upon 4p9, and those of 4p16–4p17 do so indirectly. Spinoza does emphasize “regarding as present” in his theory of imagination. That notion, however, is vexed, since, by 2p17s, in any idea of imagination, including ideas about the past and present, we regard objects as present. Moreover, as Michael Della Rocca has emphasized, Spinoza does nothing to show, at 2p16–2p18, that the imagination of a thing as present contributes to the intensity or power of a given idea. These propositions, then, seem to do little to support 4p9.

If it is true that Spinoza has no basis for maintaining that passions inspired by objects regarded as present tend to be stronger, then the details of his account of akrasia, however plausible, have little basis in his

psychology. This doctrine serves, moreover, as a basis of other views, notably, Spinoza's general account of the power of reason against the affects (see §5.1).

Other problems arise from the account of the knowledge of good and evil at 4p8. An akratic case is one in which a person knows the better but pursues the worse. Spinoza's account of knowledge of the better, knowledge of good and evil, at 4p14–4p17 is founded upon 4p8: the proposition according to which our knowledge of good and evil just is an affect of joy or sadness insofar as we are conscious of it. That formulation, together with the proposition's demonstration, is interesting but also problematic.

First, because passions cannot be adequate ideas, it is difficult to see how passive joy or any form of sadness could be genuine knowledge. They are inadequate ideas. As Spinoza acknowledges at 4p64 and in a scholium on God's causation of evil in *Ethics* 5 (5p18s, see §5.3), this problem is particularly acute with respect to the knowledge of evil.

Perhaps Spinoza's phrase "*vera cognitione*" accommodates this problem, if the ideas in question are true (correspond to their objects) without being genuine knowledge (adequate, or clear and distinct ideas). In that case, however, Spinoza's doctrine of akrasia is less robust than we might like: we do not in these ideas, strictly speaking, *know* anything, including what is best. Moreover, Spinoza's references at 4p15dem to his theory of mind's activity (3d2 and 3p3), which does invoke genuinely adequate ideas in association with the knowledge of 4p8, seem unwarranted, and the relation of the account of akrasia to the accounts of reason, understanding, and the knowledge of God that follow becomes less evident.

Second, if we take our awareness of any passion just to be limited, imperfect knowledge of good and evil, how are we to understand the dynamic of akrasia on Spinoza's account? Suppose that Malamud's Yakov fears poverty and decides that it would be best to work. By 4p8, this is knowledge of evil. Now, at work, the smell of a bowl of noodles gives him hope of eating them, which by 4p8 is knowledge of the good. We might call it akratic if Yakov judges that the evil of poverty outweighs the present good of the noodles but nevertheless pursues the noodles. Still, it is not clear that Yakov's first desire arises from genuine knowledge: it just is a form of sadness and an inadequate idea. Moreover, it is not clear that his second desire is *not* a form of knowledge. If it is conscious at all, then by

4p8, it is. Spinoza's conception of akrasia seems on reflection, then, to be similar to the position of 4p1, which Spinoza emphasizes at 4p14dem: if a cognitive state has an affective component, the two are not clearly related and only the latter matters to our motivation. The conception of knowledge, however, is not robust at 4p8 and, it seems, should apply alike to any affect.

4.2.2 Can a Striver after Being Really Commit Suicide?

In the course of his detailed account of what human beings do in striving to persevere in being, Spinoza contends that those who kill themselves are overwhelmed by external causes (2p18s, 2p20s). The discussion at 2p20s offers a useful account of what it means to be overwhelmed by external causes. There, Spinoza describes three different ways in which this might happen together with examples of the first two ways: direct external compulsion, as when another person twists a soldier's sword arm and thereby causes him to stab himself; choosing a lesser evil over a greater evil, as when Seneca opened his veins at a Tyrant's command in order to avoid worse at Nero's hands (for the classic account, see Tacitus's *Annals* 15.61.); and the body's acquisition of another nature as the result of the influence of external causes on the imagination. The third way is, I think, the common, tragic type of suicide, from depression or other mental illness, cast in the peculiar terms of Spinoza's theory of human imagination.

Several features of these positions in the *Ethics* and of these passages raise the questions of whether and in what circumstances Spinoza takes genuine suicide to be possible. There is some straightforward evidence—3p4—that suggests that genuine self-destruction for any singular thing is impossible. Because Spinoza cites this proposition in the demonstration of his striving doctrine, 3p6, there is reason to think that just as nothing can destroy itself so nothing can strive for its own destruction. Spinoza cites both 3p4 and 3p6 at 4p20dem; he cites 3p4 and 3p7 prior to his discussion of suicide at 4p18s.

At the end of 4p20s, he writes that such self-destruction is impossible: “that a man should, from the necessity of his own nature, strive not to exist . . . is as impossible as that something should come from nothing.” The first example, to my mind, is further evidence of such a view. Certainly, I would not agree that a person who is physically forced by another to stab himself is a genuine suicide or is self-destructive. Instead, this is simply murder. If

Spinoza means for all cases of being overwhelmed by external causes to be similar, then he means for none of them really to be suicide at all.

It is not clear that Spinoza does mean for the cases to be similar in this way, however. The last case, which includes no example, describes external causes working on the imagination rather than simply the body. Striving is expressed in our ideas, including, by 3p9, our inadequate ideas, that is, our ideas of imagination. We may well think, then, that people of this third type, unlike the swordsman case, have as a conscious goal in acting to end their own life. That looks like striving, albeit as a partial cause, to end one's own life. It is of a piece with other self-destructive desires, such as greed and envy, that Spinoza discusses, even if self-destruction is more directly invoked in it. This sort of behavior cannot follow from the necessity of our own nature in the sense that it cannot follow from a person as an adequate cause. Much of what we do, however, we do as inadequate causes. If Spinoza takes suicide to be impossible because it is self-destructive behavior motivated by passion, then he will also have to take a whole range of common human behavior to be impossible.

Finally, it is unclear whether suicide can follow from reason. Later in *Ethics* 4 Spinoza argues that "from the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils" (4p65). The second type of death that he describes at 4p20s is one in which a person follows the lesser of two evils. It seems, then, as though Seneca followed a dictate of reason in ending his own life. Reason, of course, is an adequate idea. If Seneca acted from reason, then he acted as an adequate cause in ending his own life.

On my view, Spinoza greatly admired Seneca, and this second sort of action, on his account of it, is clearly the right sort of action. What this point shows about Spinoza's conception of perseverance in being is subtle and interesting. What we really strive for is the greatest possible causal activity. Usually, that means the greatest possible power to live, so striving to persevere in being just is striving to preserve one's life. In extreme cases, however, the two notions can diverge. Seneca's choice was between one final act of his own choosing—opening his veins—and no further activity at all, that is, simply being killed by Nero. His position was not good, but he did the best he could by choosing the one action.

4.2.3 Can Knowledge and Biological Survival Both Be the Highest Good?

Spinoza's intellectualism at *Ethics* 4p26–4p28 is emphatic. We do not strive to understand things for some further end (4p26dem). We know nothing to be good except what leads to understanding and nothing to be evil except what prevents us from understanding (4p27). Knowledge of God is the mind's greatest good and greatest virtue (4p28). All three passages emphasize the mind, and of course a body, on Spinoza's account, cannot have knowledge. The passages raise the question, then, of the relation of goods of the body, and particularly the body's preservation, to these mental goods.

One might take Spinoza's intellectualism to be the heart of his ethics. On this view, although self-preservation in the ordinary sense of keeping oneself alive might have seemed to be the single goal of human action at 3p6, it turns out that true perseverance in being consists in knowledge. This interpretation may find support at 4p21, where Spinoza seems to suggest that the desire to live well requires a desire to live. Such a view might seem to make bare living a good that is instrumental to what holds intrinsic value, that is, on the intellectualist view, the acquisition of further knowledge.

Looking forward, Spinoza's discussion of the eternity of the mind and the value of, especially, the third kind of knowledge in *Ethics* 5 may also support this strong, exclusive intellectualism: this is the kind of good that the human mind enjoys even despite the destruction of the body (5p23). The doctrine suggests a kind of asymmetry in Spinoza's accounts of mind and body. The fact that one of Spinoza's doctrines finds something more in mind than in body (if it does) is some reason for thinking that the interpretation of another of his positions that also has this implication is well-founded. The passages following 5p23, then, support a strong intellectualist reading of *Ethics* 4.

Alternatively, emphasizing 4p18s and other passages in which Spinoza emphasizes self-preservation and opposes the desire to preserve oneself to suicide, one might contend that living, or perhaps maximizing one's power to live, is the fundamental good in Spinoza's account and that knowledge is good because it is instrumental to life. At passages such as 4p18s and 4p20s Spinoza seems to make life intrinsically good; associates destruction, on the other hand, with death; and suggests that any goods that are instrumental

are instrumental to life. Spinoza's definition of the good as useful (4d1) might also contribute to this view. It suggests that anything that he finds good is instrumental in some sense; indeed, even in the demonstration to 4p28 he writes that the knowledge of God is the mind's greatest advantage, suggesting that even the highest good is good *for* something. Perhaps it is good for preserving one's life. Finally, Spinoza's frequent invocations of nature in his accounts of human striving may seem more plausible understood in the way: as Hobbes's account of conatus in animals suggests, we do seem to desire what preserves us and to be averse to what may harm us.

The biological preservation view, however, also faces challenges. Despite the language of 4p28dem, Spinoza's principal theme from 4p26–4p28 is that knowledge is a non-instrumental good: we seek it for no further end (4p26), and, when we do anything by reason for some further end, that end is understanding (4p27). Moreover, if implausibility is a genuine mark against an interpretation of Spinoza's ethical theory, it may be saddling Spinoza with a badly implausible view if we take him to maintain that knowledge is conducive to biological survival. Frequently, it is not, as when, knowing that the train is about to crash, I tense up or, knowing that war is dangerous, I act cautiously. Being obliviously relaxed or foolishly courageous might be a more effective means to survival. Of course, finding an instrumental relationship between trivial or rarefied knowledge and survival is also frequently difficult to do.

Finally, one might maintain that the highest good of the body, on Spinoza's view, is one and the same thing as the highest good of the mind. The view is difficult to grasp: what, considered corporeally, is the knowledge of God? The view has substantial textual support, however. Spinoza writes at 4p25 that no one strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything else just before he writes at 4p26dem that we do not strive to understand things for the sake of some end. That suggests that the preservation of being just is, on Spinoza's view, understanding.

4.3 The Natural State and the Civil State: 4p29–4p37

At 4p37s2, Spinoza introduces his theory of the state in terms of a transition from a natural state to a civil state. The strategy is a familiar one in theories of social contract: we must compromise our natural freedoms in some way

in order to gain the benefits of society. In the *Ethics*, the doctrine depends upon a theory of human nature, both for an account of the mechanism by which human beings enter into or remain in society and also for an account of the benefits that we gain in doing so. The passages that precede 4p37s2 meet these demands. In them, Spinoza develops a theory of agreement in nature (4p29–4p31c); applies that theory to the case of particular interest, the human being (4p32–4p35s); and describes the benefits of human cooperation (4p36–4p37s1).

My distinction between the first two topics is somewhat artificial. Spinoza writes of “us” (*nobis*) and “our nature” (*nostra natura*) repeatedly from 4p29–4p31c, and these passages also emphasize good and evil, concepts that Spinoza typically applies only to human beings. Nevertheless, these passages differ from 4p32–4p35s in that they do not invoke the theory of passions: the doctrines that Spinoza develops in them apply, therefore, to a broad range of singular things, including things that are much less complex than human beings.

At 4p29, Spinoza argues that one singular thing can aid or restrain the power of another only if the two things have something in common or, equivalently, have natures that are not entirely different. In the demonstration, he invokes 2p6 and the causal barrier between the attributes, suggesting that 4p29 is well read as a requirement that any singular thing must be a mode of the same attribute of another that it aids or restrains.

Spinoza invocation of nature at 4p29 together with 4p29dem suggests that anything at all that belongs to the attributes that we belong to also shares our nature to some extent or, to anticipate 4p31, can be good or evil for us. Later, at 4p32s, his account of stones may be in tension with this doctrine: he writes that a stone and a man do not agree in anything. By 4p29, however, Spinoza’s view seems to be that any two things in the same attribute share a nature to some extent. Because stones and human beings are both modes of extension (and ideas of those modes), that doctrine suggests that they do agree in nature. Of course, a stone can be good or evil for a human being, so perhaps 4p29 is the better doctrine.

The main claim at 4p32, “insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature,” is more nuanced than the claim about stones. Another person does agree with me in nature to a degree, and insofar as she does, she can do me good or evil. If, however, she does me evil it is because, to some extent, she and I disagree in nature.

Among modes of our attributes, any that harm us will do so only insofar as they differ in nature from us (4p30), and any that help us will do so only to the extent that they share our nature (4p31, 4p31c). The demonstrations to these doctrines draw upon Spinoza's theory of striving: we do not destroy ourselves (3p4), so nothing that has something in common with us will tend to our destruction. Indeed, we preserve ourselves, so anything that has something in common with us will help us to do so.

These doctrines concerning similarity raise familiar problems from accounts of the state of nature in chapter 13 of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. If two people are just alike (that is, have the same nature) insofar as they want the same things and may be violent in the pursuit of those things, it may not seem plausible to suggest that they will not harm and will be help one another. If we both want the one apple and are both ready to fight for it, what we share—a violent desire for apples—is unlikely to motivate you to help me in securing this apple for myself. In short, to have a nature of the same kind (I want to preserve myself and, similarly, you want to preserve yourself) and to have the same nature (such that we both want to preserve the same thing, humanity perhaps) are different things. Spinoza anticipates this objection and addresses it at 4p36s. The response depends upon his account of what it is that two human beings seek insofar as they have same nature.

Two human beings do not agree in nature and can even oppose one another insofar as they are subject to passion, by 4p32–4p35, because being subject to passion is being subject to the influence of external things and, in that influence, not wholly expressing one's own nature. I think that this doctrine depends upon Spinoza's understanding of essence (see §3.2.2). On that doctrine, as I understand it, any two individual human beings will have the same individual essence insofar as they are both human and insofar as they act. Because, however, striving expresses itself both in action and in passion (3p9), their individual essences include their passions as well as their actions. That is why Spinoza can say that two human beings differ *in nature* insofar as they are passionate at 4p32: each has a nature that includes passions, but insofar as each is active, each has the same nature. That is also why insofar as human beings act 4p35–4p36, they agree and are a great help to one another.

Spinoza can address the Hobbesian objection above by reference to the goods that human beings seek. The task is easier with respect to Spinoza's

intellectualism: we all seek knowledge and knowledge is not, as an apple is, exhausted in the taking. As Spinoza writes at 4p37dem2, all of us can enjoy it. Spinoza also addresses the objection by reference to physical survival at 4p35s: “by helping one another [men] can provide themselves much more easily with the things they require, and . . . by joining forces [they can] avoid the dangers which threaten on all sides.”

Neither response, however, is entirely convincing. In circumstances of shortage, it is not clearly rational for one person to help another either to avoid danger or to acquire apples. Even with respect to knowledge, while it is true that people frequently learn more easily together, it may also be true that you could learn more if I would cook and clean for you while you study.

Of greater interest is the view that two different human beings “have the same nature” (4p36dem) and that our greatest good is “common to all” (4p36). If our human nature is not just similar but the same, then what benefits me as a human being will also benefit you: the apparent conflict in the Hobbesian objection dissolves because our natures are the same nature to this extent. Essence is a difficult notion in Spinoza, but several of the passages in these propositions seem to reflect this view. I think that 4p35dem might offer the clearest such passage: “insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things which are good for human nature, and hence, for each man, that is (by 4p31c), those things which agree with the nature of each man.” Spinoza’s response to the Hobbesian objection at 4p36 has a similar flavor, emphasizing what is essential to human beings rather than the benefits of rational cooperation. Finally, further evidence for the importance of human nature to Spinoza’s account of the origins of the state may be found in his references to animals at 4p35c2s and 4p37s1. It is because animals have a nature that differs from human nature that we need not join with animals and may, Spinoza writes, “use them at our pleasure.”

Spinoza’s account of the origins of the state at 4p37s2, then, emphasizes passion rather than rational conflict in the state of nature as the threat that states address. He introduces the concept of a right of nature (*ius naturae*), under which, by nature, each of us does what follows from our nature and judges for ourselves what is good or evil (G2/237.20–24). Spinoza maintains that if we were wholly rational, we might then proceed without need of society (G2/237.26–28), a point that distinguishes his view from

Hobbes's. On Spinoza's view, it is because we are irrational to some degree, that is, subject to passion, that a state is necessary:

But because they are subject to the affects (by 4p4c), which far surpass man's power, *or* virtue (by 4p6), they are often drawn in different directions (by 4p33) and are contrary to one another (by 4p34), while they require one another's aid (by 4p35s). (4p37s2, G2/237.29–33)

We “give up” our natural right, then, Spinoza argues, in order to live harmoniously.

In a state, the natural rights to act and to judge good and evil are both altered. In particular, states take away any private right to avenge oneself, and, in them, what is good or evil is decided by common agreement (G2/238.9–12). Relatedly, familiar normative concepts that are de-emphasized in or missing from Spinoza accounts of good, evil, and virtue prior to 2p37 find a place within the state: just, unjust, sin, and merit (G2/237.15–16, G2/238.25–29, G2/239.1–13). (These, recall, are a topic of 1app. See §1.4 above.) Spinoza takes each concept to be related to a state and its rights. Sin, to take the clearest example, is simply disobeying the state (G2/238.26). Finally, Spinoza incorporates an interesting view about property at 4p37s, which distinguishes his view from the well-known view that founds Locke's contract theory. In the state of nature, Spinoza writes, “nothing can be said to be this man's and not that man's. Instead all things belong to all.” In a civil state, however, once again, what belongs to each is determined by common consent (G2/238.29–34). Property, then, originates with states and is, with laws and the public judgment of good and evil, a means that on Spinoza's account we take collectively in order to mitigate the bondage to passion.

Generally, the state redresses the hazard of passion, on the account of 4p37s2, by making laws and using threats to ensure that they are obeyed (G2/238.15). Spinoza defends this vision of the function of the state by appealing to 4p7: an affect can only be restrained by stronger, contrary affect. The fear (see §4.3.3) inspired by threats must be strong enough to overcome the passions that otherwise would lead people to fail to cooperate or to conflict. It supplies a motive, when citizens are not guided by reason, to obey the law or, in other words, not to sin.

4.3.1 Does the *Ethics* Include a Basis for the Disregard of Animals?

At 4p35s, in the course of arguing that human beings can help each other to survive, Spinoza volunteers the view that animals are less worthy of our knowledge than human beings. Where he returns to the subject, Spinoza's treatment of animals is surprisingly harsh:

[T]he law against killing animals is based more on empty superstition and unmanly compassion than sound reason. The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us to establish a bond with men, but not with the lower animals, or with things whose nature is different from human nature. We have the same right against them that they have against us. Indeed, because the right of each one is defined by his virtue, *or* power, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men. Not that I deny that the lower animals have sensations. But I do deny that we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us. For they do not agree in nature with us, and their affects are different in nature from human affects (see 3p57s). (4p37s1)

The passage emphasizes the point that, because animals' natures differ from human nature, so even their passions will differ from otherwise similar human passions: human lust drives human procreation; equine lust drives equine procreation; and so on for insects, fish, and birds (3p57s). This difference, on Spinoza's view, supplies a justification for using animals at our pleasure and presumably makes them less worthy of study than other human beings.

Spinoza differs from Descartes, on most interpretations of Descartes, because—as this passage shows—he accepts that animals are like us in having sensations, feelings, and, generally, minds. His incrementalism suggests that animals are similar to us insofar as they have minds and bodies and that, if they are different from us, it is because they are simpler or perhaps complex in a different way. These views, I think, make his disdain for animals still more surprising and puzzling.

Setting to one side the issue of whether Spinoza's conclusions about animals are right or wrong (of course, they are wrong), the passages are interesting because they raise the question of whether or how the views are of a piece with Spinoza's other commitments. This question may turn on Spinoza's claims about the natures of species. On this issue, the scholia may seem to differ. The scholium to 4p35 emphasizes biological survival: I will find in experience that other human beings help me to survive “dangers that threaten on all sides”; this is a reason to admire them and, on the other hand, to disdain animals. The scholium to 4p37 suggests, instead, that it is because I have the same nature as other human beings, but not the same nature as animals, that I may do what I please with animals. One might

read, “the rational principle of seeking our own advantage,” (this is *nostrum utile*) in egoistic terms here: for all of us, it is true that one should seek one’s own advantage. Given Spinoza’s emphasis on species and his claims about human nature, however, it might be better read as a principle requiring each member of a species to favor the species: for all human beings, it is true that each should seek human advantage. Are we to prefer human beings to animals, on Spinoza’s view, because human beings are a greater help to us, because we share their nature, or both?

4.3.2 Is Spinoza a Social Contract Theorist?

The term “contract” (*pactum*), which does not occur in the *Ethics*, occurs frequently in the TTP. A particularly important use is in Chapter 16 (G3/193). There Spinoza’s description of the state of nature resembles that of 4p37s2. After describing the problem, however, Spinoza adds, what is absent in the *Ethics*: “That’s why, though men may promise with definite signs of an ingenuous intention, and contract to maintain trust, still, no one can be certain of another’s good faith unless something else is added to the promise.” Reference to contract is rare once again in the TP (but see the use of *contractus* at TP 4.6).

Perhaps the presence and absence of “contract” suggests evolution in Spinoza’s view. Or perhaps this is only a matter of terminology. Spinoza does write at 4p37s2 that, in order to enter the state people must “give up” (*cedant*) their natural right and “make one another confident that they will do nothing which could harm others.” If the giving up of a right and thereby making others confident just is a contract, then Spinoza is a contract theorist of the state even in the *Ethics*. Indeed, this may be, despite the absence of the term “contract,” a *stronger* kind of commitment than Spinoza takes us to make in entering states in the TTP. After all, he suggests in several passages there (Chapter 16 at G3/191–G3/192 is perhaps the clearest) that we do *not* give up our natural right in entering a state. It is this view, he writes in a 1674 letter, four years after the publication of the TTP, that distinguishes his theory most sharply from Hobbes’s: “As far as Politics is concerned, the difference you ask about, between Hobbes and me, is this: I always preserve natural Right unimpaired, and I maintain that in each State the Supreme Magistrate has no more right over its subjects than it has greater power over them” (Letter 50, to Jelles).

My sense of 4p37s2 is that in it Spinoza refers frequently to bases earlier in the *Ethics*, and particularly to his hedonistic psychology and foundational accounts of bondage, in order to defend his account of the state. His theory of the state should then, in the first instance, be explicable in those terms if it is of a piece with the argument of the *Ethics*. With that objective in view, it may be best to notice Spinoza's term "confidence" (*securus*, G2/238.1) in the sentence that reads most like an account of the moment of transition to society. The *Ethics* includes a definition of the noun form of this term, *securitas*; it is "joy born of the idea of a future or past thing, concerning which the cause of doubting has been removed" (3defaff14). In addition to having a basis in the formal apparatus of the *Ethics*, this notion holds central importance to Spinoza's accounts of society in the TTP, [Chapter 3](#), and the TP, especially 1.6 and 5.2. The end for which we live in a state, whether by contract or otherwise, on Spinoza's various accounts is consistent. If this is the heart of his social theory, the question of contract and of change across his different views should perhaps be framed in terms of *securitas*.

4.3.3 Which Passion Should Be the Principal Tool for the Control of Passion?

The primary function of the state, as Spinoza presents it at 4p37s2, is to ensure that those who would otherwise be motivated by passion not to cooperate do so. The implication, which is more explicit in later works (see, for example, TTP 6 G3/297–G3/298), is that the state can ensure that citizens act *in accordance with* reason even when they do not act *from* reason. The state accomplishes this trick, Spinoza writes, "by threats" (4p37s2 G2/238.15). In greater detail, "No affect can be restrained except by an affect stronger than and contrary to the affect to be restrained, and everyone refrains from doing harm out of timidity (*timore*) regarding a greater harm" (4p37s2 G2/238.7–9).

So stated, Spinoza's account of the motivation for entry into a state seems weak. Timidity is a kind of fear, in which, as Spinoza writes in this passage, we accept a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater, future evil (3p39s). Avoiding a greater evil by accepting a lesser one, as we have seen in the discussion of Seneca's suicide (§4.2.2), is a dictate of reason (4p65). Why should Spinoza expect the passionate to enter the state (or, if it is a

question of ongoing obedience, to obey the law) from a dictate of reason? Moreover, obedience to the state is particularly important in times of mutual threat. If obedience is grounded on accepting lesser harms in order to avoid greater ones, then whenever a citizen anticipates a greater harm in obeying the state than in disobeying—as perhaps when the enemy attacks—we can expect her to disobey. (This is a problem that also confronts Hobbes; see, especially, the “Review and Conclusion” to *Leviathan*.) Finally, and most important, throughout his writings Spinoza consistently maintains that his project is to improve his fellow human beings’ lives as much as possible. Near the beginning of the TIE, for example, he writes that he wants to “form a society of the kind that is desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and as surely as possible” (TIE§14). Indeed, as we have seen, providing for one another is a theme of the argument leading up to 4p37s2. To bring the passionate to cooperate by inflicting on them a form of sadness that is more powerful than any passion that motivates them not to cooperate—that is, to threaten a greater harm—harms them. It seems inconsistent with Spinoza’s broader aims.

The emphasis on threats and fear at 4p37s2 should, I think, therefore be seen as a mistake, even on Spinoza’s own terms. A sympathetic critic might try to show that it is not and that these problems are either not serious or not regarded as genuine problems for Spinoza’s own theory. For this purpose, one might emphasize a distinction between the threat of a given harm and the harm itself, under which the threat, while a form of sadness, is not so great as the sadness threatened.

A more promising approach, I think, is to take 4p37s2 as a tentative and incomplete approach to a theory of society and to take the weakness of Spinoza’s argument to be something that he notices and struggles to address in interesting ways. The TTP emphasizes devotion, which is a form of wonder and love (see §3.4.1) as a means of attaining obedience. There, Spinoza explains the introduction of religion into society as means of supplying a motive for cooperation that is superior to fear: “That’s why Moses, by divine power and command, introduced religion into the Republic, so that the people would do their duty not so much from fear as from devotion” (TTP [Chapter 5](#), G3.75). Devotion raises problems of its own. In particular, the belief in miracles that associates with wonder and so with devotion in religion is, on Spinoza’s view, highly irrational. For a philosopher who associates the human good with knowledge, it can be hard

to explain how religion benefits citizens any more than fear does. In any case, Spinoza is explicit in the TTP that a principal advantage that we gain from society is an escape from fear:

Still, no one can doubt how much more advantageous it is to man to live according to the laws and certain dictates of our reason. As we've said, these laws and dictates aim only at the true advantage of men. There's no one who does not desire to live securely, and as far as possible, without fear. (TTP, Chapter 17, G3/91)

In the TP, which perhaps draws more explicitly on the doctrines of the *Ethics*, Spinoza expresses less optimism about religion as a source of coordination and obedience: “[Religion] has no weight in the marketplace or the court, where we need it most” (TP 1.5). Spinoza also forcefully rejects societies that gain obedience by dominating and enslaving their subjects: “A Commonwealth whose subjects, terrified by fear, don't take up arms should be said to be without war, but not at peace” (TP 5.4, see also TP 6.4). He seems to rely there most strongly on hope and the closely related affect, *securitas* or security, as passions that can both bring citizens to obey and at the same time benefit them: “For a free multitude is guided by hope more than by fear, whereas a multitude which has been subjugated is guided more by fear than by hope” (TP 5.6). This again may be an imperfect solution, however. As this passage suggests, on Spinoza's accounts of the passions, hope and fear at least tend to go together (see 4p18s; 3defaff12–3defaff13exp; and 4p54s).

4.4 Normative Ethics: 4p38–4p73

Spinoza offers normative ethics, that is, accounts of the value of particular things, states of body or mind, or actions, in many passages in *Ethics* 4, beginning perhaps with 4p18s, where he writes, “now it remains for me to show what reason prescribes to us” From 4p38–4p73 the majority of propositions are normative. These consist in two sorts of claims. Many, and most of the elements from 4p38–4p49, concern good and evil. Others, and most of the elements from 4p50–4p73, concern reason.

Spinoza refers, in these discussions, both to affective states that can sometimes be good and sometimes be evil and also to affective states that can sometimes be rational and sometimes be irrational. While these distinctions may seem to make the discussions of goods and evils and the

discussion of reason similar, Spinoza does not, in them, make the same sort of claim. Many different passions, and also the ends that we seek from a passion and the actions that we take in seeking them, may be good or evil in different circumstances; but the affects associated with reason and the actions that we take from reason, on Spinoza's account, are invariably valuable.

In claiming that some affect can be good or evil, Spinoza refers to a human passion of a given form. Pleasure (*titillatio*) is a kind of joy that is a change to some part or parts of the body more than others (3p11s). This form of pleasure—tickling may be an example—can be good if the body is oriented such that it is not otherwise harmed: as a form of joy, it is a pro tanto good (4p41). If the body is helped by the tickling, it can even be good all things considered: perhaps the foot in question was particularly numb or irritated beforehand, such that the person could not walk; now that the foot is better, the person can walk again. On the other hand, Spinoza argues at 4p43, if the body overall is harmed, a passion of the same form can harm it. A philosopher engaged in acquiring the knowledge of God can be easily distracted, and so harmed, by a tickle that, in other circumstances, might have been a good.

Compare this to the case of reason. In claiming that some affect, self-esteem (4p52), for example, can arise from reason or cannot, Spinoza does not similarly refer to an affect of a single given form. Some affects of self-esteem—that is, instances in which a mind considers its own power of acting—are active. They always and invariably arise from reason, and it is always good for a person to have this affect. Other affects are also called “self-esteem” because they also are instances in which a mind considers its own power of acting. These affects are passions, however—affects of which the subject is only a partial cause. They therefore are affects of a form different from the self-esteem that arises from reason. *One and the same type* of passion, pleasure, can be good or evil. *Different types* of self-esteem are rational or irrational. Those that are rational are always good.

The claims that different affects may be good or evil, as my example suggests, have a foundation in Spinoza's understanding of the complexity of the human body, which he emphasizes at 4p38–4p39. As stated in the propositions, the view of 4p39 is unsurprising: basically, what preserves the body's form is good. The view of 4p38 is more difficult to understand: “whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great

many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways is useful to man.” Spinoza complements this abstract talk of capability later with a refreshingly straightforward account of what is good for the body, which helps to explain 4p38:

It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. For the human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things at once. (4p45c2s)

What 4p38 means, basically, this scholium suggests, is that because the human body is complex we need to take care of ourselves in a variety of ways.

While 4p45c2s is nicely clear, I will return to the difficult terminology of 4p38 and 4p39 because they form a basis for the claims about good and evil that follow. (I will discuss only goodness in order to simplify the presentation.) Spinoza argues that those things that make the body more capable of acting on or being acted on by the world are useful to us and, therefore, good (4p38). Then, he argues that those things that tend to preserve the human body’s form—that is, the characteristic ratio of motion and rest among the parts of the body—are good just because, in doing so, they are useful in the first sense (4p39dem). That argument may be surprising. If we understood the good simply as perseverance in being or the means to it, the goods described at 4p39 would be good directly: they preserve the human body’s form. I think—although this is difficult to see at 4p39dem—that the goods that Spinoza describes at 4p39 do describe the good directly. They are simply a particularly useful variety of the goods that he describes at 4p38. They are particularly useful because, like all goods, they are the sort of things that render us more capable of acting to some extent or in some degree—call these “pro tanto goods”—but also never render us less capable of acting. They are always good, all things considered. The goods of 4p38 are pro tanto goods but not always all-things-considered goods.

Spinoza refers to 4p38 and 4p39 in the propositions that follow, and those references support this interpretation of the doctrines. Forms of joy, he argues at 4p41, are directly good, because they are increases to the

power of the body. In the demonstration, Spinoza cites 4p38 but only writes about the body's power of acting, which suggests that he equates the complex language of 4p38—disposing and rendering more capable being affected or affected—simply with an increase in power of acting. One form of joy, cheerfulness (*hilaritas*), is always good (4p42). Spinoza argues (4p42dem) that, in cheerfulness, all the body's parts maintain the same proportion of motion and rest and so, this time by 4p39, it is always good. Pleasure, on the other hand, can be evil because it relates only to one or several parts of the body such that it might be excessive in that it interferes with the body “being affected in a great many ways” and so, by 4p38, may be evil (4p43). The complex language of 4p38 and 4p39 thus grounds this distinction between pro tanto goods that may fail to be all-things-considered good and pro tanto goods that cannot so fail. The former only relate to parts of the body; the latter relate to all of the body. This distinction traces back to 3p11s, which Spinoza cites frequently in these demonstrations (see §3.3).

While some of the propositions about evil passions rely on earlier bases in Spinoza's theory of the affects (4p45, 4p45c1, 4p46, 4p48, and 4p49), several others build on the distinction between pro tanto and all-things-considered goods. While, as forms of joy, they are pro tanto goods, passionate love and desire can be evil because love can be a form of excessive pleasure and desire can arise from such pleasure (4p44). Hope and fear always involve some kind of sadness, so, by the 4p38 account, they can never be pro tanto goods (4p47). They can, however, be good all things considered, if the particular kind of sadness “can restrain an excess of joy” (4p47dem). This characterization also might apply to pity (4p50). These propositions, 4p38–4p50, thus draw upon the complexity of the body and the variability of human circumstance in showing the extent to which the value of particular passions might vary.

I have suggested that reason offers a much tidier and stricter conception of value. This is evident in those passages where Spinoza begins to emphasize reason more than good or evil. Pity (4p50), humility (4p53), repentance (4p54), and fear (4p63) *never* arise from reason and, what means the same thing, are not virtues. Nevertheless, it is clear that Spinoza takes these passions sometimes, even frequently, to be all-things-considered goods. He writes at 4p54s: “Really, those who are subject to [humility, repentance, and reverence] can be guided far more easily than others, so that in the end they may live from the guidance of reason, that is, may be

free and enjoy the life of the blessed.” To arise from reason or to be a virtue, on the other hand, is to be a rare affect that is invariably valuable because it is active.

Where Spinoza turns to propositions that mostly concern reason, then, his views concern affects, motives, and behavior that is wholly active. Forms of favor (4p51), self-esteem (4p52), and love of esteem (4p58) are affects that arise from reason, and we are virtuous insofar as we have them. Motives from reason relate to no passion, such as fear, and only relate to minds insofar as they act (4p63 and 4p63dem). In more detail, they include a concern for the real advantage of the whole person (4p60, which I interpret liberally); an equal consideration of past, present, and future things (4p62); and pursuit of the better of two goods and the lesser of two evils (4p65), again with no consideration of time (4p66). It is a very restrictive set of motives, which excludes many of the contingent goods and contingently good passions that Spinoza includes in his broader normative ethics.

Spinoza introduces the notion of a free man at 4p66s. I think that the propositions are well-understood to be further claims about action from reason. Like the label “free man” itself, some of the free man propositions emphasize freedom and free action. One interesting proposition, 4p68, entertains a conception of a human being that Spinoza himself takes to be counterfactual (4p68s), on which—what is impossible for a human being by 4p4—a man is totally free. The others—as I read them—concern what it would be for a human being, even though finite and vulnerable to external forces, always to act freely. The notion of free action here associates closely with action from reason. Spinoza does bring freedom and action from reason into contact at 4p66s, where he writes that a person who is led by reason is a free man (see, similarly, 4p67dem., and 4p68dem). Later, at 4p73, Spinoza simply refers directly to “a man who is guided by reason.”

While these doctrines are distinctive in their appeal to a free man, then, they are, like the propositions that precede them, about rational human activity. They differ, perhaps, in emphasizing rational behavior or “manner of living” rather than affects and motives, but it is not always easy in them to distinguish a rational motive from a rational action. Perhaps it is best to say that, on Spinoza’s view, there are characteristically rational motives and that these can lead to a wide variety of actions, indeed—and it is surprising to me that Spinoza should make this claim—to *any* action that a passion

might motivate (4p59). Nevertheless, rational motives do tend to produce actions of certain types, and the free-man propositions concern such actions.

In these propositions, then, Spinoza argues that from reason we meditate on life and pursue the good directly (4p67); that we can from reason either overcome or avoid danger (4p69); that from reason we live in a state (4p73) but that also we avoid as much as we can accepting favors from the ignorant (4p70); that genuine thankfulness arises between people insofar only as they are reasonable (4p71); and, perhaps problematically, that free men are only ever honest (4p73).

So understood, Spinoza's normative ethics includes a *broad account of value* that incorporates the fact of human passion in a series of claims about instrumental and contingent goods and evils as well as a *narrow account of value* that describes those affects, motives, and actions that are intrinsically and invariably good. How precisely we are to use this account as a guide to life may be unclear. Spinoza does maintain that the goods associated with reason, such as rational self-esteem and the knowledge of God, are the best goods. At 4 Appendix he may also suggest that action from reason is better just because such actions are always good:

3. Our actions—i.e., those Desires that are defined by man's power, *or* reason are always good; but the other [Desires] can be both good and evil.

4. In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, *or* reason. (4app3–4app4)

As Spinoza's concedes in recommending "new and varied nourishment" at 4p45c2s, however, a life entirely dedicated to the pursuit of such goods might be both a worse and a less rational one.

4.4.1 How Is Spinoza's *Ethics* Elitist?

Certainly there is some elitism in the *Ethics*. It is evident, for example, in the famous ending of the work:

If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found. And of course, what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare. (5p42s)

What precisely Spinoza's elitism consists in is, however, difficult to say.

One potential source of elitism in Spinoza normative ethics is the distinction between rational and other goods. Some ends, such as the perfection of intellect (4app4), and states, such as rational self-esteem (4p52), associate with reason and, therefore, are intrinsically and always valuable. Other ends—my favorite is the beauty of green plants, which we should take care never to enjoy immoderately (4p45c2s)—and states, such as pleasure (4p54s), have value only in certain circumstances. There is no scarcity of the goods associated with reason such that one would think that only a few people can have them. Indeed, it is one of the points that Spinoza emphasizes in advertising the good of knowledge that it “can be enjoyed by all equally” (4p36). Nevertheless some elements of Spinoza’s presentation may suggest that only a few free or relatively free people can enjoy a life characterized by rational activity, the acquisition of knowledge, and justified self-esteem. Others in society, “the ignorant” of 4p70, must get by with the goods that they have the good fortune to acquire in their interactions with external things. On this view, the free live in society (4p73), but they interact principally with one another (4p71) and are cautiously prudent in their other interactions (4p69, 4p70).

A second such source may be found in the distinction between states that are pro tanto good (such as joy 4p41) and states that are pro tanto evil but all things considered goods. These pro tanto evils include many traditional virtues: humility, reverence, repentance, hope, fear, and, probably, pity. While Spinoza’s official position is that these evils can be instrumentally good for those who possess them, he seems also to recommend these passions as means of controlling the many:

If weak-minded men were all equally proud, ashamed of nothing, and afraid of nothing, how could they be united or restrained by any bonds? The mob is terrifying, if unafraid. So it is no wonder that the prophets, who considered the common advantage, not that of the few, commended humility, repentance, and reverence so greatly. (4p54s)

This presentation emphasizes the difference between the few and the mob and suggests that, setting aside any consideration of the good of “the mob” (*vulgus*), it is in the interest of those few who are not weak-minded that those many who are should be humble rather than proud.

Whether and how readers find Spinoza to be elitist will influence our evaluation of Spinoza’s normative ethics, of course. It may also hold importance for our understanding of the TTP, where Spinoza offers a much

more detailed account of religion and recommends it, at least in a qualified way, to all. Indeed, readers have frequently found, in part on the basis of the doctrine of the *Ethics*, that the TTP is itself an elitist, esoteric work. If the *Ethics* includes, on such a view, considered convictions that are cloaked by the explicit presentation of the TTP, then his explicit elitism in the *Ethics* should inform an interpretation of the particular sorts of elitism that the TTP's esotericism hides. Together with 1 Appendix, 4p46–4p73 offer a principal basis for finding elitism, and especially elitism about religion, in the *Ethics*.

4.4.2 Is Spinoza's "Right Way of Living" Really a Guide to Action?

Few of Spinoza's claims about the value of affects, actions, or ends in *Ethics* 4 look like unqualified prescriptions. Together with the stated purpose of *Ethics* 5, which is to show what power the mind has over the affects (G2/277.15–19), a reader might reasonably come to the conclusion that few of the claims are such recommendations. Nevertheless, Spinoza does claim in the Appendix to *Ethics* 4, to have presented an account of the right way of living. Different claims about value might contribute to such an account in different ways.

A few passages—and particularly 4p18s—suggest that reason demands certain kinds of actions. The commands of reason seem to be clear prescriptions of a kind. It may, however, be unclear whether on Spinoza's view we should simply do what reason demands because such actions hold intrinsic value or whether we should do them because they fulfill some basic desire for one's advantage, perhaps, or for self-preservation. Perhaps, if we cannot do what reason demands *from reason*, it is not even the case, on Spinoza's view, that we should perform that kind of action.

In other passages, the relation between Spinoza's recommendations and our own action is still less clear. Spinoza does make some decisive claims about value: cheerfulness can only be good (4p42); hate can never be good (4p45). Despite the bluntness of these claims, however, it may not be clear how they are supposed to move us. Certainly, and to his credit, Spinoza does not seem to recommend straightforwardly that I tell myself or someone else to be cheerful or not to be angry. Perhaps I, and you, should work to bring about circumstances in which we are cheerful.

More claims concern states, actions, or ends that can sometimes be good and sometimes be bad. This view characterizes, for example, all of those affects that, following the account of 4p38, relate to some part or parts of the body more than others. It also characterizes any action at all that can arise from passion; the same action can arise from reason and, therefore, be good (4p59). For action from passion, I think that Spinoza's insistence that our knowledge of the order of finite causes is inadequate—for example, in the view that imaginative self-knowledge is inadequate (2p27, 2p29) or that we cannot know duration (3p8)—suggests that we may frequently not know whether a given passion is bad. If we cannot recognize the relevant features of situations, though, it would seem to be difficult to apply these propositions as guides for action. For action from reason, the prospects are better: I know whenever I know (2p43), so I should know whenever I act from an idea of reason.

Finally, in the case of the free-man propositions, Spinoza describes the behavior of the sort of person that we might admire, and he suggests (4p66s) that this is merely a way of continuing his account of the guidance of reason. The descriptions of the free man's actions that follow, however, seem much stronger than previous accounts of what reason commands. It is not clear that they are or should be equivalent to straightforward prescriptions. Earlier commands of reason—for example, that from the guidance of reason we should follow the greater of two goods (4p65)—seem like the kind of advice that might well be the right thing for anyone to do, whether we are already as free as we can be or not. The free man's actions—and notably always acting honestly—do not have the same clear appeal. Notably, honesty does not, on the face of it, seem like a sure means to perseverance in being for everyone. Generally, it seems like bad advice to suggest that, in line with the definition of the good (4d1), it is good for everyone all the time to behave in the way that a model of human nature behaves. Carissa Moore is the exemplar of a surfer. In our quest to become more like Carissa Moore, should you or I act as she does and paddle out into three-meter waves on the North Shore? It might be better to swim a few laps in the pool first.

In more detail, if we take the free-man propositions to be prescriptive, it is not clear whether they offer advice that we can follow consistently. For example, Spinoza argues that the free man avoids danger (4p69) and also that the free man always acts honestly (4p72). I, however, am not a

maximally free person, and the entire account of bondage—4p4 is perhaps the clearest passage—emphasizes the point that all human beings are continually subject to passion. How should my actions be informed by my knowledge of what a free man would do? Should I, too, always act honestly? Or how does knowing what I would do if I were maximally free inform my practical deliberation?

4.4.3 Is Freedom Attainable?

Spinoza appeals to a model of human nature at both the beginning (see §4.1.1) and the end of *Ethics* 4. It is a feature of the *Ethics* that holds interest for its relation to his other commitments—such as his criticisms of teleology and his accounts of the ordinary use and meaning of value terms—as well as for its place in his normative ethics (as we have seen at §4.4.2). It is also a feature of Spinoza's moral theory that prefigures strategies that some philosophers take today in order to understand human interest or value: what is good for me to do is what I would choose to do if I had all of the relevant knowledge. Given, particularly, the strength of bondage on Spinoza's account, there is a question of whether we can become like this person. If we cannot, then the question of how to understand the point of the model becomes more pressing.

Steven Nadler argues that the free man is an attainable goal and has offered an account of what the free man, on Spinoza's view, is like. It may seem that the free man is an unreachable and remote ideal if, in conceiving of him, we conceive of a human being who has only adequate ideas. Spinoza himself describes the free man in this way at 4p68dem but also writes that the conception is false and cannot be conceived at 4p68s. Nadler, emphasizing the various passages in which Spinoza characterizes the free man as *led* only by reason (4p66s, 4p67dem, the beginning of 4p68dem; 4p72dem), contends that the free man is a reachable and useful human ideal because, while the free man has passions and inadequate ideas, he only acts from reason.

More, however, has to be said than that such a person acts only from reason. On this limited description, one might happen to meet the ideal by means of luck: suppose that, committed to the study of nature and well-protected by caretakers, I never encounter a serious temptation on my way to the laboratory or the library. I might be a very weak person indeed: a

single chocolate bar could derail me entirely. Because I never encounter even a chocolate bar, however, I only ever act from reason. Perhaps, some elements of this story *are* a part of Spinoza's account of the free man: avoiding favors from the ignorant might require avoiding the streets where chocolate bars are available. That such a weak person could meet the ideal, however, suggests that Spinoza has something more in mind in his account of the free man than simply a human being who always acts from reason.

Rather, the free man must be a human being of "great virtue" (4p69), the most power that a human being can have. That virtue expresses itself in action from reason, certainly, but what precisely it consists in remains unclear. Perhaps an emphasis on affects rather than actions will help. On Nadler's interpretation, the free man experiences passions but does not act on them, and, in that sense, is always guided by reason. Many of Spinoza's propositions about what is irrational, however, concern affects: pity, in a man who lives according to the guidance of reason, is evil (4p50); humility does not arise from reason (4p53); nor does repentance (4p54). If the free man can experience passion so long as he does not act on it, then we can imagine a free man who experiences pity, humility, and repentance so long as they do not characterize his actions. Spinoza characterizes the free man, however, in terms of his mental states: he meditates on life (4p67), is truly thankful to others (4p71), and is honest (4p72). These seem to be characteristics of a human mind that is as free as possible from passion and that has powerful ideas of reason. Suppose that Soo-Nyung does not always act according to the dictates of reason but is, to the greatest extent possible, free from passion and that Chiyonofuji, being sheltered and lucky, does always act according to the dictates but is nevertheless highly passionate. Who more closely approaches Spinoza's model?

Recommended Reading

- Garrett, Don. 2010. "'Promising' Ideas: Hobbes and Contract in Spinoza's Political Philosophy." In *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, edited by Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal, 192–209. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted in *Nature and Necessity*. (A clear, useful comparative account.)
- Hübner, Karolina. 2018. "Spinoza's Unorthodox Metaphysics of the Will." In *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, edited by Michael Della Rocca, 343–369. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Offers an argument from metaphysics against the possibility of suicide for Spinoza.)

- Kisner, Matthew. 2011. *Spinoza on Human Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Systematic interpretation of Spinoza's moral theory emphasizing freedom and rationality.)
- LeBuffe, Michael. 2010. *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence*. New York: Oxford University Press. (My interpretation of Spinoza's moral psychology and ethics.)
- Locke, John 1960. *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by Peter Laslett. London: Cambridge University Press. (Locke's theories of property in chapter 5 of the Second Treatise are usefully contrasted to those of Spinoza and Hobbes.)
- Nadler, Steven. 2016. "Spinoza on Lying and Suicide." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24 (2): 257–278. (Defends the view that Spinoza takes suicide sometimes to be rational.)
- Nadler, Steven. 2020. *Think Least of Death*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (A recent, powerful account of the free man.)
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1994. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Carol Diethe. New York: Cambridge University Press. (See especially Essay 1 for a theory of value terms resembles Spinoza's in some respects.)
- Soyarslan, Sanem. 2019. "Two Ethical Ideals in Spinoza's Ethics: The Free Man and The Wise Man." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 5 (3): 357–370. (A nuanced account of the free man.)
- Steinberg, Justin. 2018. *Spinoza's Political Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (A good resource for Spinoza's social contract theory and his emphasis on *securitas*.)
- Wilson, Margaret. 1999. "For They Do Not Agree in Nature with Us": Spinoza on the Lower Animals." In *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy*, 178–195. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (An influential interpretation of 4p35s and 4p37s.)

Spinoza in Literature

- Malamud, Bernard. 2004. *The Fixer*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

5

The Power of the Intellect

Ethics 5 may seem to have two distinct halves. The Preface and the opening elements address the problem of human bondage directly. The Preface explains why what Spinoza takes to be Descartes's overly optimistic and poorly defended account of the control of passion fails, and the first twenty propositions set up an alternative based on the more solid footing of *Ethics* 1–4. After 5p20, however, Spinoza turns away from what “concerns this present life” (5p20s) and toward that part of the mind that cannot be destroyed with body but “remains” (5p23). With this turn, Spinoza's subject at least appears to change. He no longer offers practical advice about how to live as a finite thing among powerful external influences. Instead, the propositions concern traditional topics of eschatology, including eternity, the love of God, blessedness, and salvation.

While the change seems dramatic, there are nevertheless reasons to find continuity in the discussion of *Ethics* 5. First, God, on Spinoza's account in *Ethics* 1, is nature or, more precisely, nature regarded as a cause of being. Loving God, then, is loving nature and does not require us to turn our attention away from this world. Second, Spinoza's intellectualism in ethics presents the good as what is useful to us as a means of approaching closer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves, and it makes the knowledge of God the highest good. There are difficult questions about how knowledge can be the sort of good that Spinoza takes it to be (see §4.2.3). Those questions have already arisen in *Ethics* 4, however. Spinoza's position is that the knowledge of God is the most useful thing to the human mind in the course of life. Together, these two points show that, where Spinoza turns to blessedness and the love of God, his subject continues to be the best life that a human being can live in the face of external threats and, especially, harmful passion.

Descartes's work dedicated to the same subject, *The Passions of the Soul*, is a target of criticism in a Preface to *Ethics* 5. Spinoza focuses on Descartes's doctrine of the pineal gland—the part of the brain that, on

Descartes's account, unites mind and body—and Descartes's claim that we can acquire complete control over our passions, rejecting both views strongly. The opening elements of *Ethics* 5 (5a1–5p10s) present methods for understanding and opposing passion that Spinoza takes to be highly effective: “he who will observe these [rules] carefully . . . will soon be able to direct most of his actions according to the command of reason” (5p10s). In a series of propositions that follow (5p11–5p20s), Spinoza builds a further method, on which the mind orders its affects and so relates them to God and loves God. Following the scholium to 5p20, Spinoza turns to the eternal part of the mind and human blessedness (5p21–5p42). In these propositions, as I understand them, Spinoza builds further upon his account of the virtue that we can attain while we are alive. This chapter includes parts on the Preface and each of these groups of elements.

5.1 Descartes, Passions of the Soul, and the Pineal Gland: 5 Preface

In the opening lines of the Preface, Spinoza emphasizes the point that his project is to show the power of reason against the affects (G2/177.10, G2/177.16–17). As we will see in §5.2, some of Spinoza's recommendations in *Ethics* 5 do concern reason in the narrow sense of the second kind of knowledge. Indeed, some may refer to a still narrower set of ideas, the common notions. These passages, however, refer more broadly to human nature considered as a mind. The project is to show what a mind can do, insofar as it is active, to mitigate passion.

From the beginning, Spinoza acknowledges the power of human bondage. As 4p4 suggests most clearly, human beings are, from our nature, always vulnerable to powerful external forces. Such forces can harm us directly, of course, as a piano falling from the sky can crush me. They can also act more subtly, however, by causing us to have passions that weaken us or alter our behavior. This second kind of harm is what Spinoza calls the bondage to passion. While Spinoza makes strong claims, particularly at 5p10s, about the effectiveness of the methods that he presents to mitigate bondage, he takes himself already to have shown that the methods cannot eliminate passion: “For we have already demonstrated above that [the mind] does not have an absolute dominion over them” (G2/277.19–20).

Spinoza presents this view as an improvement on the views of some predecessors, the Stoics and Descartes. These, I think, do not represent two different targets. Rather, Spinoza takes Descartes's account of the control of the passion to be a version of a Stoic view. Broadly speaking, he attributes two views to his opponents: first, in virtue of a strong will, we can choose not to give in to passion (G2/277.20–22); second, by means of repetitive practice, we can alter our behavior to be whatever we want it to be, despite any external influence (G2/277.22–278.3).

An example complicates the question of the relation—or what Spinoza takes to be the relation—between these views. “Someone,” he relates, writes that by means of practice he was able to train a house dog to hunt and a hunting dog not to chase hares (G2/277–G2/278). The dog example seems to suggest that, considered within a single attribute—if dogs are just bodies and not minds—the Stoic/Cartesian account of the control of passion holds. That is, the view in question seems to be one on which even creatures who lack free will can be free from the impulses that ordinarily motivate them. Perhaps, the example suggests, the principal position at issue is not one on which *because* we have free will we can completely overcome our passions. Rather, Descartes or the Stoics are wrong *both* that free will is involved and also that our behavior can be altered in whatever way we like. Both positions are at issue, and, while these views might be associated, they need not be.

The bulk of 5 Preface concerns Descartes's theory more explicitly. Spinoza focuses on Descartes's doctrine of the pineal gland and Descartes's application of the doctrine in the second half of *Passions of the Soul*, Part 1 (see, especially, *Passions* 1.27, 1.35, and 1.50). Descartes's view, which I think Spinoza presents accurately, is that the gland is extremely sensitive to the motions of “animal spirits” in the brain, such that its position can change as the motions change (G2/278.4–28). The motions, however, are frequently caused by external things as the body interacts with the world. This, then, is how the mind knows the external world. Spinoza does not mention this point, but, like Spinoza himself, Descartes makes the mechanisms of sensation and passion similar, so this mechanism explains, for example, both how we see an external thing and, if it does so, how that thing inspires passion in us (*Passions* 1.35–1.36). Descartes maintains that certain relations of the mind and the body are in place by a kind of natural institution. For example, our pupils dilate with the effort to see a distant

object (*Passions* 1.44; Spinoza restates this example, G2/278.19–24). Nevertheless, Descartes argues, we can change natural institution, and also our bad habits, by means of free will, through effort and acquired habit (*Passions* 1.45–1.50; G2/278.20–G2/279.3).

Descartes's account of how we should overcome passion is, perhaps surprisingly, similar to Spinoza's own:

Our passions, too, cannot be directly aroused or suppressed by the action of our will, but only indirectly through the representation of things which are usually joined with the passions we wish to have and opposed to the passions we wish to reject. For example, in order to arouse boldness and suppress fear in ourselves, it is not sufficient to have the volition to do so. We must apply ourselves to consider the reasons, objects, or precedents which persuade us that the danger is not great; that there is always more security in defense than in flight; that we shall gain glory and joy if we conquer, whereas we can expect nothing but regret and shame if we flee; and so on. (*Passions* 1.45)

Descartes here suggests that, by willing ourselves to do so, we can think about why we should be bold rather than fearful. The representation of those reasons to ourselves arouses boldness. A few sections later (*Passions* 1.49), he argues that representations from knowledge of the truth are the best source of such reasons. Spinoza records the position—to my eyes, accurately—in the Preface: “[W]e shall acquire an absolute dominion over our passions, if we determine our will by firm and certain judgments according to which we will to direct the actions of our life, and if we join to these judgments the motions of the passions we will to have” (G2/279.12–16).

The discussion already bears a close resemblance to Spinoza's account of the opposition of passions at 4p1s, and it will also resemble some of Spinoza's remedies for the passions in *Ethics* 5 (5p5–5p10s). Of fear, for example, Spinoza writes, “To put aside fear we must think in the same way of tenacity: i.e., we must recount and frequently imagine the common dangers of life, and how they can be best avoided and overcome by presence of mind and strength of character.” Spinoza disagrees with Descartes about the systematic superiority of defense over flight (4p69, 4p69c), an issue that goes back to Plato's *Laches*. The resemblance, otherwise, of Spinoza's recommendation to Descartes's raises the question of precisely why the Preface attacks Descartes so pointedly.

Apparently, it is Descartes's acceptance of mind-body union and his detailed theory of mind-body interaction in the pineal gland that are the

principal offenders. As a preliminary point, Spinoza argues—in a manner reminiscent of the correspondence between Elisabeth and Descartes that gave rise to the *Passions of the Soul*—that mind-body union, contrary to Descartes’s own convictions about philosophical method, is obscure (G2/279.17–G2/280.4). Then, Spinoza turns to a detailed criticism of the pineal gland, which includes three charges. First, the mechanism that Descartes proposes for explaining how to overcome fear does not work. Spinoza argues that if this were the mechanism, the pineal gland might wind up positioned such that the mind “could think only of flight” (G2/280.12–13). Second, in accordance with 2p6, any view on which will, which is mental, could cause motion, which is corporeal, should be summarily rejected. Finally, and intriguingly, Spinoza argues that Descartes’s accounts of the body are mistaken. The gland that Descartes picks out is not situated in the brain in such a way that it can be easily moved, as Descartes insists. Moreover, all of the nerves of the human body do not reach the brain in the way that Descartes’s theory requires (G2/16–19). Descartes’s view, then, is internally inconsistent, metaphysically impossible, and physiologically mistaken.

In its place, Spinoza proposes that the “power of the mind is defined only by our understanding” (G2/280.21–22). Taking notice of what precedes this claim can help us to understand what Spinoza means by it. Some of his methods for resisting passion do not differ substantially from Descartes’s; he is not offering a wholly new theory. Rather, his harsh attacks on mind-body union and interaction suggest that Spinoza thinks that he can retain elements of traditional accounts of the ways that we can overcome passion—or on his view mitigate passion—that are, unlike those accounts, metaphysically and biologically respectable.

5.1.1 What Does the Dog Example Mean to Descartes and to Spinoza?

I have been unable to find a source in the ancient Stoics for Spinoza’s example about the hunting dog and the house dog (G2/277.24–G2/278.3). There is a similar example, however, in the *Passions of the Soul*, and it occurs in one of the two passages that Spinoza cites at 5 Preface:

[W]hen a dog sees a partridge, it is naturally disposed to run towards it; and when it hears a gun fired, the noise naturally impels it to run away. Nevertheless, setters are commonly trained so that the sight of a partridge makes them stop, and the noise they hear afterwards, when someone fires at the bird, makes them run towards it. (*Passions* 1.50)

Descartes has suggested that setters lack reason and perhaps thought altogether. Because they do, they lack passions of the soul as well. Nevertheless, dogs have all of the physical apparatus related to passion that we do. It is simply that, in them, the stimulation of nerves from the outside produces responsive action without any mediation by a mind. That physical apparatus, he argues here, is plastic enough that some of the dogs' natural behaviors can be completely reversed.

Descartes writes little about *how* the mechanism that controls setters' behavior can be changed. He does, however, insist that it can. He expresses the view that human beings' and setters' bodies are relevantly similar, so whatever training mechanism works on setters ought to work on us as well. Why, then, cannot our own natural behaviors and corporeal bases for passions be overcome, or, if Spinoza has his way, mitigated, by corporeal training?

Perhaps the point is not that they cannot but that, in order to have a life that is truly better, a person needs to have a better life as a mind. On the theory of value in Spinoza, and I think that is true of Descartes as well, a setter who runs toward a gunshot may have a life that is no better and no worse than that of a setter who runs away from a gunshot: in Descartes's example, both are merely sophisticated automatons. Similarly, if we could retrain the behaviors that are fixed by nature in the human being (whether considered as a mind-body union or a mind and a body that are one and the same thing), the human being would be different, but not better.

What is needed for a change to be a genuine improvement in us is autonomy of a kind, and this is where will, for Descartes, finally comes into the picture. For Descartes, human beings act on their own power when they act from their own will. In order for the training of the body to be part of change that makes a human life better, the free mind must be the one doing the training.

Spinoza is skeptical about the claim that what is instituted by nature may be overcome. He accepts, however, something like this notion of human improvement: we are better off insofar only as we are more active. While he firmly rejects Descartes's theory of free will, Spinoza also gives an account

of how human beings can become more active, and Spinoza's account also emphasizes mind. What Spinoza requires is an account of how we ourselves can take advantage of whatever plasticity is in us to make ourselves less passionate, less susceptible to passion, or more active. While a change in behavior is part of what overcoming bondage involves, the source of the change in human motivation holds central importance.

5.1.2 To What Extent Do Advances in Biology Explain the Criticisms of Preface 5?

Spinoza takes Descartes to commit to bad philosophical positions in his theory of the human passions, of course. These include the doctrines of free will and mind-body causal interaction. In the Preface, however, Spinoza goes further in his detailed attack on the pineal gland, arguing that Descartes's particular version of how the mind interacts with the body is empirically ill-founded.

Descartes's definition of "passion of the soul" invokes the gland implicitly, and Spinoza quotes it in the Preface: "[Passions of the soul are] perceptions, or feelings, or emotions of the soul, which are particularly related to the soul, and which are produced, preserved, and strengthened by some motion of the spirits' (see *Passions* 1.27)" (G2/279). The spirits in question are physical. They are the "most lively and finest" parts of the blood (*Passions* 1.10). On Descartes's account, a passion of the soul, then, originates in body and is the product of an ongoing influence of body on mind. While Descartes maintains that the human soul is united with the whole of the body (*Passions* 1.30), he also maintains that the pineal gland in the brain is the part of the body where the soul "exercises its functions more particularly than all the others" (*Passions* 1.31). (Spinoza, incidentally, recognizes this view in writing that the soul is "especially" (*praecipue*) united to the pineal gland (G2/278.5)). The pineal gland is so important because it is suspended "above the passage through which the spirits in the brains' anterior cavities communicate with those in its posterior cavities" (*Passions* 1.31). This position enables soul to "radiate through the rest of the body by means of the animal spirits, the nerves, and even the blood" (*Passions* 1.34), such that even very slight movements in the gland can change the course of the spirits. The gland, in turn, is extremely sensitive to the motions of spirits, such that "it can be moved by

them in as many different ways as there are perceptible differences in the objects” (*Passions* 1.34). Spinoza rightly recognizes the reference to motions of the spirits in Descartes’s definition, then, as an invocation of the doctrine of the pineal gland.

Much of Spinoza’s criticism of the doctrine draws upon his conviction that mind-body interaction is unintelligible, leaving Descartes unable to explain, even in principle, any of the details of the mind-body interaction in the pineal gland (G2/280.4–16). Spinoza includes, however, two detailed claims about physiology: “To this we may add that this gland is not found to be so placed in the middle of the brain that it can be driven about so easily and in so many ways, and that not all the nerves extend to the cavities of the brain.” The charge, like the rest of Spinoza’s argument at 5 Preface, shows careful attention to *Passions* 1.31–34 and also knowledge of the brain. Steno, an anatomist and later a critic of Spinoza whom I mention briefly in the Introduction, makes both of these charges against Descartes in a 1669 work, *Discourse on the Anatomy of the Brain*, and Spinoza probably studied the brain with Steno.

The criticism is a rare glimpse in the *Ethics* of Spinoza’s detailed knowledge of physiology. Together with a few other small bits of evidence, including notably his letter to Oldenburg on the circulation of the blood (Letter 32, November 1665), this passage of 5 Preface may offer broader insight into Spinoza’s concerns. It suggests that his conception of the passions and their management was informed not merely by metaphysics but also by his understanding of the human body.

5.2 Understanding and Imagination against the Passions: 5a1–5p10s

Spinoza’s attack on Descartes at 5 Preface is successful. Both Descartes’s highly controversial, unclear metaphysical commitments to free will and mind-body union and interaction and also his doctrine of the pineal gland make the arguments of *Passions of the Soul* vulnerable to criticism. The tables turn, however, in the opening formal elements of *Ethics* 5. Having dismissed Descartes, Spinoza faces the difficult task of showing, from his own strong, controversial, and highly restrictive metaphysics, how bondage to passion might be mitigated. Spinoza’s necessitarianism and strong determinism make it difficult to understand the point of offering techniques

for resisting passion, and his rejection of mind-body causal interaction makes it difficult to understand how what Spinoza proposes to champion in *Ethics* 5, the power of the intellect, can mitigate passion, which is psychophysical and arises, most clearly, from the human body's interactions with external bodies.

In the opening ten propositions, Spinoza develops a series of proposals about how the mind can mitigate bondage by ordering and connecting its ideas. This technique, which Spinoza introduces at 5p1, is, at the same time, an activity by which we order and connect affections of the body, a point that must follow from Spinoza's accounts of finite causation in *Ethics* 2 and that he makes at 5p10. Two of these proposals receive particular emphasis. First, Spinoza contends that we can master a harmful passion, such as fear or hatred, by understanding it. The view is clear but also, as we will see, problematic: "An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it" (5p3). On the second proposal, which emphasizes the accounts of the power of affects that open *Ethics* 4, we can mitigate the harm of passion by cultivating more powerful opposed affects and, particularly, affects related to reason. For example, Spinoza argues, we can overcome hate by cultivating nobility (5p10s). The clearest expression of this view is 5p7: "Affects arising from or aroused by reason are, if we take account of time, more powerful than those related to singular things we regard as absent." At 5p10s, Spinoza summarizes the two proposals—as I read these propositions, the first is itself a process or ordering of the affects and the second a way of utilizing well-ordered affects—and offers explicit prescriptions requiring action on them.

Two axioms set out the task of controlling the passions. By 5a1, if there are two opposed actions (*actiones*) in a given subject, one or both will have to change until they no longer oppose one another. The axiom enters into the argument for Spinoza's second proposal, at 5p7dem. Its emphasis on time—considering what happens over time if there are two opposed affects in a single mind—may add something to the account of the power of affects in *Ethics* 4. Spinoza's use of "actions" is unhelpful, however. The argument of 5p7dem will concern passion. At 5a2, Spinoza reinforces a view that is evident earlier in the *Ethics*, perhaps most clearly at 4p5: the power of an effect, such as a passion, will be a function of the power of its cause. Returning to the case of two opposed affects, the notable implication of 5a2 is that passions have causes in external things as well as in human nature,

such that a passion's power to oppose another affect will be, in part, a function of the power of its external cause.

The first proposition, which Spinoza cites at 5p10dem but not in the argument to either principal proposal, addresses the challenge that Spinoza's conception of the mind-body relation presents: "In just the same way as thoughts and ideas of things are ordered and connected in the mind, so the affections of the body, or images of things are ordered and connected in the body" (5p1). In the demonstration, Spinoza draws upon propositions central to his account of the mind-body relation: 2p6c, 2p7, 2p18, and 3p2. The doctrine of association of ideas at 2p18 may be the most helpful for understanding Spinoza's view. By 2p18 (see §2.2 and §2.4), whenever the human body interacts with two external bodies at the same time, the human mind will tend to associate them: whenever it imagines one of the bodies again, it will also imagine the other. It does so just because the mind is one and the same thing as the body: when the body changes, the mind changes. Spinoza's argument at 5p1dem is, in effect, that the same rule applies to changes in mind. Because body is one and the same thing as mind, when mind changes, body changes. This is, surely, a way of understanding mind by means of body and body by means of mind, which either violates or helps to delineate Spinoza's conceptual barrier between the attributes (see §2.1.2). It is not clear, though, that Spinoza violates any causal barrier at 5p1. The claim—to this point of *Ethics* 5 at any rate—is that the order of thoughts in the mind is the same as the order of affections in the body.

At 5p2, which contributes to 5p4s, Spinoza's view concerns passions that include the thought of an external cause and, explicitly, love and hate. In language reminiscent of Descartes's (see the quotation of *Passions* 1.45 in §5.1), he argues that if a mind can separate a passion from an external cause and join it to other thoughts, then the passion is destroyed. The demonstration is, I think, convincing but unsatisfying: hate, for example, is by definition a passion accompanied by the thought of an external cause, so, *if* we separate the passion from the thought of an external cause, we will no longer have hate. The demonstration is unsatisfying for two reasons. First, Spinoza does not offer any reason in it for thinking that we could in fact separate the sadness involved in hate from the thought of an external cause and, second, he offers no reason for thinking, even if the passion is no longer hate, that it will not continue to be a severe, if different, form of sadness.

Note that in 5p2 itself Spinoza writes “hate toward the external cause is destroyed.” The specification of hate in this way seems to leave open the possibility that Agnon’s Yeruham, for example, could detach his hate from me and attach that sadness to the idea of some other external thing, such as the unfortunate neighbor who happens to be walking by, forming a new hatred. As Spinoza’s citation of 5p2 at 5p4s suggests, such a change is clearly not what he has in view. The change should be one in which we overcome the passion and come to have knowledge.

As we have seen, the proposal that we mitigate bondage by understanding passion has a strong, clear, and uncompromised form in 5p3. The demonstration considers a given passion of the mind, a confused idea, and purports to show that, if we could form a clear and distinct idea of this idea, the passion would be destroyed. The elements that follow soften the uncompromised form of the proposal and relate it to body:

5p3c: The more an affect is known to us, then, the more it is in our power, and the less the mind is acted on by it.

5p4: There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form some [*aliquem*] clear and distinct concept.

5p4c: From this it follows that there is no affect of which we cannot form some [*aliquem*] clear and distinct concept. (Translation modified)

Its corollary, without argument, applies incrementalism to 5p3. As we will see (§5.2.1), it is difficult to understand how we might fulfill the promise of 5p3: even supposing that we would overcome a given passion completely if we could form a clear and distinct idea of it, it is not clear how we could ever accomplish such a task. The corollary suggests that in order to benefit, we need not accomplish the task entirely. We can know a given passion to a greater degree and we can, from any given passion, form some clear and distinct idea of it.

Spinoza moves from the attribute of thought to the attribute of extension at 5p4 before reverting to thought at 5p4c. The demonstration to 5p4 provides a suggestion about how we form some clear and distinct idea from a given passion. Any passion of a body arises in its interaction with an external thing. In any such interaction, however, some properties of the two bodies are common, and therefore, by 2p38, are known adequately. Spinoza’s citation of 2p38 in the demonstration suggests that this is his

point. Even if my passion itself is an inadequate idea, I nevertheless know something adequately in that passion in virtue of the common notions.

How this knowledge could be greater (or lesser) and what the point is of the claim that we can form some adequate idea from any affection of body, however, is not immediately clear. By 2p38, I simply have knowledge of myself and the external thing in experience by way of the common notions. I do not work to form this knowledge, and, unless 2p39's attractive suggestion that we could come to have more in common with at least some external bodies is implicit in Spinoza's incrementalism, it is hard to see how this knowledge could be greater or lesser.

In any case, 5p4cs provides Spinoza's most hopeful and detailed account of this knowledge together with a prescription requiring us to pursue it as far as possible:

We must, therefore, take special care to know each affect clearly and distinctly (as far as this is possible), so that in this way the mind may be determined from an affect to thinking those things which it perceives clearly and distinctly, and with which it is fully satisfied, and so that the affect itself may be separated from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts. The result will be not only that love, hate, and the like, are destroyed (by 5p2), but also that the appetites, or desires, which usually arise from such an affect, cannot be excessive (by 4p61). (5p4cs)

The scholium enjoins us to do what we can to know our own affects in the manner suggested by 5p3–5p4c, and it brings the opening propositions of *Ethics* 5 together in suggesting that the kind of action that 5p2 describes can and should be accomplished by means of this effort. It is not just any separation and rejoining of ideas that we should undertake; rather we should order our ideas in such a way that they reflect knowledge. When we do that, hate or love is not merely destroyed in the sense that these are no longer the right names for the passions that harm us. Rather, the scholium suggests hopefully, we transform them into less inadequate and less harmful ideas.

Spinoza proposes another way of mitigating, if not removing, affects at 5p5 and 5p6. His view is that the mind benefits from taking particular things in its experience to be necessary because, by means of this understanding, external things affect us less, a doctrine of his psychology (3p48, 3p49). The discussion of 5p6s makes the point in ordinary terms that some readers might find persuasive. Suppose that you have lost some good. Your sadness will be greater if you think that by some chance or through some action, you might have kept it. If, however, you know that the loss

was inevitable, your sadness will be reduced. The intuitive appeal of this conclusion helps to support Spinoza's strong claims about the value of knowledge for the mitigation of passion.

Spinoza draws, once again, on the doctrine of reason in the most prominent proposal of the opening elements of *Ethics* 5, 5p7, the basis for several strong prescriptions to follow at 5p10s. The argument depends on the psychological form of the common notions. On Spinoza's account, recall (§2.4, §2.4.1), the common notions are known in all experience whatever: they are always present to mind. If an affect arises from such notions, then, it will always be present to mind and will therefore be more powerful than ideas that are not so constant (see §4.2.1 for discussion of this view). By 5a1, if two opposed affects occur in a mind, one will have to change until they cease to be opposed. The common notions, however, never change, so any passions that they oppose will have to change.

The final propositions leading up to 5p10s are further theses about the power of affects and the power of the mind, which contribute to Spinoza's recommendations about how the mind can mitigate bondage at 5p10s and 5p20s. At 5p8, based most clearly on 5a2, which he cites at 5p8s, Spinoza defends the plausible view that a number of concurring causes of a single affect will make the affect greater. His grounds are, basically, that they are a greater external cause (although, by his definition of "singular things" (2d7), Spinoza is perhaps not entitled to call a number of different things that have one effect "different" things in this context). At 5p9, we are to consider not a number of concurring causes of a given affect but a number of different external causes that the mind relates to a given affect. As in other passages where Spinoza regards monomania as a great harm to the mind (4p44s), he argues at 5p9 that because such a mind can think of many different things, despite its affections, it is in a better state than one that can think of only one thing.

At 5p10, Spinoza asserts that the kind of action that 5p1 anticipates is possible: "So long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect." At 5p10s, he suggests that the proposals for controlling passion that he has just made, principally at 5p7, are means by which we may do just that. Generally, he writes, "it should be noted that in ordering our thoughts and images, we must always (by 4p63c and 3p59) attend to those things which are good in each thing so that in this

way we are always determined to acting from an affect of joy.” Spinoza offers a “rule of reason” on which we should frequently consider one such affect, nobility, and its usefulness for overcoming the wrongs of others. By doing so, we will always be ready to exercise nobility and so overcome hate (G2/287.30–G2/288.5). Similarly, he argues that “to put aside Fear, we must think in the same way of tenacity” (G2/288.16–17). (Recall that nobility and tenacity are active affects by 3p59s and therefore can never themselves be harmful.) Of both rules, he writes that they are “sure maxims of life” and that we should “commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready” (G2/287.24–29).

Of the two proposals—understanding and overpowering passion—Spinoza prefers the former. He contends at 5p4s, that there is no “more excellent” remedy for the affects than understanding. Similarly, in recommending the means of overpowering passion at 5p10s, Spinoza writes that they are the best thing that we can do, “so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects.” Despite these qualifications, it seems to me that Spinoza puts more emphasis on overpowering the affects than on understanding them. Perhaps his qualifications of the extent to which we can understand the affects at 5p4, 5p4c, and 5p4s explain this emphasis: his view is that we should understand our passions to the extent that we can but also that this extent is not great. That is why the cultivation of nobility and tenacity, even though it is a second option, matters so much.

5.2.1 Can a Passion Be Unmade?

Spinoza argues that we can have a clear and distinct understanding of our passions, in some sense, and that there is no more excellent remedy for the affects than the knowledge of them. It is difficult to understand his arguments for this view. Put bluntly, a clear and distinct idea, on Spinoza’s use of that phrase, is an adequate idea, and a mind is a total cause of its adequate ideas. A passion, however, is an inadequate idea, and a mind is a partial cause of its passions (see §3.1). It appears, then, that a passion would have to be unmade in order to be transformed into an adequate idea, and that is impossible. As Jonathan Bennett puts this point, I can no more do

this than “I can become royal by altering who my parents were” ([Bennett 1984](#), 335–336).

The case for this objection is strong. I think that there are some resources for mitigating its importance for the assessment of Spinoza’s proposal about understanding, but none show that on Spinoza’s view, I can transform a passion into an action. First, passions, as Spinoza presents them, are frequently not simply formed at some past time. Rather, they are continually sustained by the ongoing influence of external causes. On Spinoza’s view, what is present to mind is more powerful, so present temptation or present provocation—and I think that this is a respect in which Spinoza’s theory seems plausible—is frequently a powerful source of passion. If the present, ongoing causal influence of something external can be changed, then, the passion so understood can also be changed. Indeed, change over time is a theme of the opening elements of *Ethics* 5. Both 5a1 and 5p7 consider change to passions over time.

Further resources arise from 5p3c–5p4s. Spinoza’s incrementalism at 5p3c describes the mind being acted on less as it comes to understand an affect. The view suggests that the technique under discussion does not require the transformation of an inadequate idea into an adequate one. Another resource may be found in the appearance of *aliquem* at 5p4 and 5p4c, which suggests that Spinoza’s proposal is not that we transform the passion itself but that, from it, we arrive at *some* adequate idea, which is itself good even if the passion is not. Following these elements, Spinoza summarizes the benefits in incremental terms and in terms of such further ideas:

5p4cs: There is nothing from which some effect does not follow (by 1p36), and we understand clearly and distinctly whatever follows from an idea which is adequate in us (by 2p40); hence, each of us has—in part, at least, if not absolutely—the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them.

To move from a discussion of the view that one can transform a passion into an adequate idea to a discussion of the view that one can come to form some adequate idea from one’s own passion is to change the subject. This doctrine, even if it is well-grounded in Spinoza’s psychology, does not save 5p3. Just because it is a different doctrine, however, it should be evaluated independently.

A final resource, returning to Spinoza's epistemology, is 2p41, Spinoza's claim that knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity. That doctrine suggests that while all ideas of imagination are inadequate, the error that we risk in having them is an effect of those ideas. To gain the sort of understanding of an idea that makes it less likely to have harmful effects achieves a certain epistemological task: it prevents those ideas from causing falsity. In the context of the passions, in particular, the practical task that such understanding achieves might be the principal task: although the passion remains, it does not have the harmful effects that it might have had.

5.2.2 Is Spinoza's Intellectualism Genuine?

Spinoza depends upon his theory of the common notions (2p38, 2p38c) repeatedly in the opening elements of *Ethics* 5. The demonstration to the claim that a passion ceases to be a passion if it is understood, 5p3, cites 3p3, the account of the mind's activity that draws upon 2p38c and finds many of the accounts of reason's demands in *Ethics* 4. The related claim that we can have some understanding of any of the body's affects, 5p4, draws upon 2p38. Spinoza's proposal about the benefit of affects related to reason at 5p7, of course, draws on 2p38, again, as well as the broader account of reason at 2p40s2. Thus reason, and particularly the common notions, is one of the principal resources for Spinoza's account of the power of intellect.

So stated, the opening elements of *Ethics* 5 seem to be part of Spinoza's intellectualism: they describe the value of knowledge. Spinoza's use of 2p38 and 3p3 in these arguments, however, gives readers reason to question this conclusion. At 5p7, the most explicit reference to reason in these elements, Spinoza contends that reason is, over time, more powerful than affects "related to singular thing which we regard as absent." We know from 4p1, however, that it cannot be insofar as ideas of reason are true that they are more powerful than other ideas. In the demonstration, Spinoza explains his conviction in a way that accommodates 4p1: the common notions are ideas of common properties, so they are always present in experience. Because other causes of affects are not ever-present in this way, those affects are, to that extent, weaker than ideas of reason. It is not, in other words, insofar as the common notions are knowledge but insofar as they have a particular psychological character that they have this power. Is it, then, accurate, to consider this position part of an intellectualist ethics?

This point can be seen clearly at 2p47s, where Spinoza contrasts the common notions with another kind of knowledge, our knowledge of God:

But that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions comes from the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, and that they have joined the name *God* to the images of things which they are used to seeing. Men can hardly avoid this, because they are continually affected by external bodies. (2p47s)

The common notions, Spinoza suggests here as he does at 5p7dem, *are* known in imagination. This makes them present to mind and so, on Spinoza's account, makes them more powerful than ideas that lack this property, whether those ideas are knowledge or not.

The uses of reason at 5p10s, and perhaps also at 5p3 and 5p4, draw upon this psychological resource. Not all ideas of reason are always present to mind, on Spinoza's account, in the same way that the common notions are. The ideas described at 2p40, ideas that follow from adequate ideas, need not be. I think that such ideas are best understood as rules or regularities that we understand because we know the common notions in experience. For example, I know in each of my experiences of bodies that the body I experience is either at motion or at rest, and it follows from this knowledge that I know that any body is at motion or at rest. The rule is not known in experience, but it is continuously vindicated by experience and so may derive some advantage from this feature of the common notions. Turning to practical analogues, the sure maxims of life that Spinoza prescribes at 5p10s are "rules of reason." Like our ideas of natural regularities, these rules are not always present in experience. Spinoza recommends, then, that we keep the rules ready for us by frequently imagining them: if they affect our imagination extensively, then they will help us to resist bondage. Once again, this is a case of ideas of reason helping us, but they are helping not insofar as they are knowledge but in virtue of their psychological properties. They are extensively present in imagination.

I am not sure precisely how Spinoza takes reason to help us to achieve "as far as this is possible" (5p4s) knowledge of our affects. If he takes us to be able to move beyond that knowledge that is given to us in experience, perhaps it is by means of similar techniques: we are somehow to bring ourselves more under the influence of what we know by reason. Perhaps the "special care" that Spinoza recommends at 5p4s is, like the work that he recommends we do at 5p10s, a means of making reason still more powerful

in the imagination. Looking forward, Spinoza's frequent use of the doctrine of association of ideas in the propositions leading up to 5p20s is similar. If it is the presence to mind characteristic of imagination that gives these techniques their efficacy, then their relevance to an intellectualist ethics is open to question.

5.2.3 Why Is Descartes's Theory of the Passions a Target of *Ethics* 5?

With the project of ordering our ideas, broader themes of Spinoza's epistemology and psychology matter once more to the arguments of his ethics. The main proposals of 5p1–5p10—that we should understand our passions and, that failing, work such that we act from our adequate ideas rather than our passions—recall, I think, the sun example and the means that we have to avoid error in it. They therefore suggest an explanation for Spinoza's choice to discuss and criticize Descartes so forcefully in 5 Preface.

In Descartes's account of the sun example in the third Meditation (AT 7 39), we have two different ideas of the sun, an idea of sensation on which the sun appears small and one based on astronomical reasoning on which it is in fact very large. Descartes's own methods for avoiding error rely heavily upon his theory of human will and so cannot be Spinoza's. They are, however, surprisingly similar to Spinoza's proposals about the passions. On Descartes's view, I can avoid error simply by refusing to assent to an idea that is not clear and distinct. That is, although the sun may seem small to me, because I can recognize that the idea is not clear and distinct I should not assent to it and judge that the sun is small (AT 7 59–60). Alternatively, recognizing what is clear and distinct in my other ideas, I can judge on the basis of them. The size of the sun may be among these ideas: “what of the other aspects of corporeal things . . . (for example, that the sun is of such and such a size or shape) . . . ? [T]he very fact that God is not a deceiver . . . offers me a sure hope that I can attain the truth even in these matters” (AT 7 80). If he arrives at a clear and distinct astronomical idea of the sun's size, Descartes knows, because God is not a deceiver, he can avoid error in assenting to that idea.

Spinoza endorses versions of both of these techniques for avoiding error in the propositions that open *Ethics* 5. The methods of 5p3–5p4s focus on

the inadequate idea itself and purport to show how we can avoid acting on it by coming to know the idea better. This is a method of not acting on a given inadequate idea because one understands what it is. The methods of 5p7 and 5p10s do not attack the problematic inadequate idea directly. Instead, they give us ways of bringing ourselves to act from the better of two opposed ideas, just as Descartes will judge on the basis of the astronomical idea of the sun rather than on the basis of the sensory idea of the sun.

Descartes's more detailed discussion of sensation suggests that I can know what is perceived clearly and distinctly in such ideas and so also is similar to Spinoza's proposals. Descartes argues that we can perceive what is clear in our sensations and distinguish that from what is unclear. Pain and color, for example, are clearly and distinctly perceived when they are understood as sensations or thoughts, but we err when we judge that they are things outside of our mind (*Principles* 1.68). This argument includes both the view that we can understand some element of a given inadequate idea clearly and distinctly, which is central to 5p4, and also the view that we can avoid what is the greatest source of error in such ideas when we stop associating them with external things, which is central to 5p2.

In short, Spinoza seems to have thought that Cartesian epistemology, including versions of its doctrines that he himself could accept in some form, provides the basis for understanding how the mind can mitigate bondage to passion. This helps to explain the strong language of 5 Preface. It is, on Spinoza's view, not just that mind-body interaction is impossible and that the doctrine of the pineal gland is indefensible. It is that they are unforced errors. Descartes, on Spinoza's view, did not need them in order to show what the mind can do against the passions. He already had, in his epistemology, much better resources at his disposal for this task.

5.3 Self-Knowledge and the Love toward God: 5p11–5p20s

After making several different proposals about useful ways of ordering the affects at 5p1–5p10s, Spinoza turns to a further proposal about ordering affects so that they are related to the idea of God. He argues that minds love God to the extent that they achieve this sort of order (5p15) and that this sort of love engages the mind the most (5p16). While Spinoza maintains his conviction of 5 Preface that the mind cannot eliminate the passions, he writes that a mind in this state has passions that “constitute the smallest part

of the mind” and is characterized instead by this active affect, the love toward God, which “occupies the greatest part of the mind and affects it extensively” (5p20s). Here I will offer an account of the arguments that build to the claim that the love toward God engages that mind the most at 5p16. Then I will turn to 5p17–5p20, propositions in which Spinoza considers and rejects several other views that one might have about God and affects, before discussing the final characterization of the love toward God at 5p20s.

It may be helpful to begin the difficult task of understanding 5p11–5p16 by addressing some of Spinoza’s terminology. First, it is natural for a student of Spinoza’s theory of imagination to follow 2p17s and take “image” (*imago*) at 5p11 to refer to an affect of body. Although it may be problematic for the understanding of the love toward God in propositions that follow to do so, I think that this is nevertheless a good impulse. Spinoza writes a little later, at 5p14, “the body’s affections, or images of things” and so seems to take the terms as equivalent. While it is not immediately evident, then, that he must mean the same thing in the preceding propositions, I suggest on the basis of Spinoza’s use in *Ethics* 2 and 5p14 that readers take “image” in these propositions to refer to an affect of body. One final reason for doing so is that Spinoza claims at the beginning of 5p20s, to have treated of the love of God insofar as it is related to the body (G2/292.31–G2/293.2), and, at the end, that he will now turn to a discussion of mind “without relation to the body.” These passages suggest that in the discussion preceding 5p20s, he is discussing mind *with* relation to the body.

Next, “A is related to (*refertur*) B” is a common and generic term in the *Ethics*, meaning simply, as in English, that there is some relation between A and B. However, I think that at 5p11 and 5p12, Spinoza uses the term to capture a causal relation of some sort. Spinoza refers to 5p8, and so to 4p5, at 5p11dem in arguing that an image that is “related” to more things “has more causes by which it can be aroused and encouraged.” Perhaps “more frequent” and “engages more” at 5p11 suggest something more specific: a thing that is related to more things can be caused by more things (even if it is not in a given instance caused by them). Thus, suppose that a light bulb has many switches and that each switch adds a certain amount of brightness. The more switches the bulb has, the more likely it is to be lit (more frequent); the more bright it is likely to be (engages more).

A slightly different relation, at 5p12 and 5p13 is, “A is joined to (*juncta est*) B.” Relating and joining in these uses take different sorts of objects. Whereas images (again, corporeal affects) are related to what can cause them, they are joined to other images. In discussing joining, Spinoza refers to the association of ideas, the doctrine of 2p18 (2p12dem, 2p13dem), suggesting that a body in which two images are joined is like a mind that experiences two objects at once: any consideration of the one joined image will immediately bring the mind to consider the other. (Forms of this term, *jungere*, occur in the Latin version of Descartes’s *Passions of the Soul* familiar to Spinoza; informal passages prior to *Ethics* 5; 3p35, 3p48, and several definitions of affects; and, of course, 5p2.)

Finally, by the difficult terms “more frequent” (*frequentior*), “more often it flourishes” (*saepius viget*), and “more it engages” (*magis occupat*), Spinoza means something closely associated with more powerful affects. The notion of power, from 4p5 (again, via 5p8 at 5p11dem), seems the most likely familiar term in the *Ethics* by which to explain the rest of these. By 4p5, the strength of a passion is a function of the strength of its external cause, and by 5p8, more than one cause can contribute to, and so enhance, the strength of the single passion. These terms at 5p11, then, refer closely to such enhancement. Perhaps they differ from “more powerful” in that they give a sense of describing qualities of the more powerful body, and, in the case of engagement, the more powerful mind itself, whereas the designation “more powerful” really just refers to the tendency of a thing to have effects without describing what such a thing is like.

With these interpretations of the terminology in hand, we may now turn to the propositions. Spinoza suggests at 5p11, on the basis of 5p8 and 4p5, that affects that have a greater power in a body are more frequent in the body, flourish more often in the body, and engage the mind more. The argument depends on the idea that the greater number of things that cause a given corporeal affect, the more likely the body is to have that affect and the more powerful the affect is likely to be. The next proposition, 5p12, associates relation and joining on the basis of 2p40 and 2p18. Images of things are more easily joined to those images that we clearly and distinctly understand than to other images because, Spinoza argues, what we clearly and distinctly understand is either universal in experience (2p38) or deduced from what is universal in experience (2p40s2). Such affects, then, are related to more things than others and so more frequent—in the case of

the common notions, always present—in the mind. For example, in order to join my image of the couch where I sit to the image of my cup of coffee, I have to get lucky: these two things may not be present to me at once. I will always, however, join my image of the couch with a common property.

Just as an image that can be caused by more things, by 5p11, flourishes more, so, by 5p13, an image that is joined with more images flourishes more. It does so because the association of affects provides another way for a given affect to be caused more regularly or, in other words, to be related to things. To return to the analogy between images and light bulbs, the more other bulbs, each with its own switch perhaps, are themselves switches of a given bulb (that is, are joined to it), the more likely the given bulb is to be lit (that is, the more things relate to it). By the theory of association that forms the basis for 2p18, other images themselves are, in effect, causes of a given image and so contribute to the flourishing of the image that they are joined to by the argument of 5p11. Note that 5p12 and 5p13 do not contribute to the formal apparatus in the argument to 5p16 and its characterization of the love of God. Instead, they describe, together with 5p14 (which does contribute to 5p16), ways in which, on Spinoza's view, a mind can order and connect its affects (see 5p20s at G2/393.15–17).

The notion of the love toward God, to which Spinoza turns from 5p14 to 5p16, builds upon substance monism; the accounts of self-esteem and love; our ability to understand our affections (5p4); and 5p11. At 5p14, Spinoza argues that the mind can bring it about that all of a body's affections—recall, these are “images” in the preceding propositions—are related to the idea of God. “A is related to B,” here, must be understood to refer to a cross-attribute, and so no longer a causal, relation. Spinoza argues at 1p15, recall, that whatever exists is in God and that nothing can be or be conceived without God (see, similarly, 2p47 and 2p47s). In virtue of the common notions, I have genuine knowledge of some kind in all my ideas. To know something then, I must conceive the thing and so in that knowledge conceive God. In that sense, 5p14dem suggests, all of my body's affections are related to the idea of God.

At 5p15, Spinoza associates the knowledge of God that one has in knowing one's own affects with the love toward God: “He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects.” This conclusion depends on the views that self-knowledge gives rise to an active affect

(3p53); that any self-knowledge just is the knowledge of God (5p14), such that this affect is joy accompanied by the idea of God; and the definition of love in these terms (3defaff6).

At 5p16, Spinoza concludes by arguing that, because it relates to all of the affections of body, the love of God engages the mind the most. In the demonstration, Spinoza argues on the basis of 5p14 that the love of God is joined to all of the affections of the body. The language here is problematic. Spinoza may in discussing joining implicitly refer to 5p12, which associates joining and relating but which he does not cite in the demonstration. Or he may mean that, because God causes all of the images of the body (invoking 1p15), God is related to all of the images of the body in the sense relevant to 5p11, which the demonstration does cite.

From 5p17 to 5p20 Spinoza rejects further views that one might have about God and affects. At 5p17 he contends that God has no affects, a claim that follows most readily from God's immutability (1p20c2). It is of special interest, perhaps, whether God can love, but of course it is an immediate consequence of 5p17 that God can neither love nor hate (5p17c). (See §5.4 for a qualification of this conclusion.)

Spinoza goes on to argue about what affects we can have in relation to God at 5p18–5p20. We cannot hate God (5p18, 5p18c) because our idea of God is adequate and adequate ideas do not give rise to forms of sadness. The scholium following 5p18c may be regarded as a brief—and unsatisfying—theodicy based on a similar argument: God cannot be the cause of sadness because, if he were, we would understand the cause of sadness and it would not be a passion. Indeed, Spinoza writes, “insofar as we understand God to be the cause of sadness, we rejoice” (5p18s). We cannot strive that God should love us in return for our love of God because our love of God stems from knowledge of God, and we know that God does not love by 5p17 (5p19). Finally, the fact that goods, and especially the highest good, are common to all (see §4.2.3 and §4.3) implies that the love toward God “cannot be tainted” by envy or jealousy (5p20).

In 5p20s, Spinoza takes himself to present a summary of his entire account of the power of the mind over the affects, a list that includes the proposals of 5p1–5p10 as well as those of 5p11–5p14 (G2/293.4–6). He starts by claiming that the love toward God cannot be destroyed insofar as it is related to the body. As I take it, this claim refers to the basis (via 5p4, and—if Spinoza is read to refer implicitly to 5p12 at 5p16dem—via 5p12) for

the love toward God in the common notions: what is inadequate in our ideas of imagination is never the common notions.

From this point, the scholium moves to interesting, related claims about parts of the mind, the present life, and the mind's duration with relation to the body. The parts of the mind that interest Spinoza are those constituted by inadequate and adequate ideas. He recharacterizes the effort to mitigate passion in terms of these parts: we are successful insofar as we can bring it about that passions (G2/294.9) or inadequate ideas (G2/293.32) constitute the smallest part of the mind and insofar as love toward God (G2/294.12) or adequate ideas (G2/293.31–32) can occupy the greatest part of the mind. What Spinoza writes about the present life and the mind's duration without respect to the body is at the end of the scholium: "With this I have completed everything which concerns this present life . . . [I]n these few words I have covered all the remedies for the affects. So it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation to the body" (5p20s). In the scholium, Spinoza closely associates his claim that he has finished his account of remedies for the affects with his claim that he has finished everything that concerns the present life. That association suggests that to consider the mind's duration without relation to the body is at least to consider the mind insofar as one does not consider passions. A proposition later in *Ethics* 5, 5p34 supports and clarifies this suggestion: "Only while the body endures is the mind subject to affects which are related to the passions." "Remedies for the affects" at 5p20s probably does just mean remedies to the passions because active affects do not require remedy. Nevertheless, 5p34 makes it clear that Spinoza's view at 5p20s is that he has finished discussing the mind insofar as it is vulnerable to passion and that he relates such vulnerability to the life of the body.

5.3.1 What Is the Love toward God?

These propositions, 5p11–5p16, are among the most difficult in the *Ethics*. I try to make some headway here by schematizing the argument to 5p16—which I think can be made surprisingly coherent—and by offering as precise a statement as I can of the problems that the argument presents. Here is the presentation, which includes simplifications and restatements based upon interpretative claims that I have made in §5.3:

1. (5p11) To the extent that any image of the body is related to more things, it also engages the mind more and flourishes more often. (by 5p8)
2. (5p4) The mind can have some clear and distinct understanding of any of the body's images. (cited at 5p14dem)
3. (1p15) Nothing can be conceived without God. (cited at 5p14dem)
4. (5p14) Therefore, the clear and distinct understanding that the mind can have of any of the body's images is related to the idea of God. (by 2 and 3)
5. (Implicit) Therefore, a mind that develops an understanding of all of its body's images will have an idea of God that engages it the most. (by 1 and 4)
6. (3p53) To the extent that a mind understands the affects of its body, it experiences joy. (cited at 5p15dem)
7. Therefore, The joy that a mind experiences in understanding the images of its body is related to the idea of God. (by 4 and 6; this is the use of 5p14 at 5p15dem)
8. (3defaff6) Love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.
9. Therefore, the joy that a mind experiences in that is related to the idea of God is love toward God. (by 7 and 8; this is the use of 3p53 and 3defaff6 at 5p15dem)
10. (Implicit) A mind's love toward God just is the mind's idea of God, regarded as an affect. (by the cognitive element of love at 3defaff6)
11. (5p16) Therefore, a mind's love toward God is what engages the mind the most. (by 5 and 10)

As I read the argument, it raises three difficulties for Spinoza. First, the use of "idea of God" at 5p14 makes the application there of 1p15 unclear. If we understand "A is related to B," in the sense of 5p11 and 5p12, then an image is related to something else if it can be caused by something else. The "images of things" at 5p14 are explicitly corporeal. Spinoza appears to maintain at 5p14dem, then, that the idea of God causes something corporeal, a violation of the causal barrier between attributes.

It seems to me that Spinoza ought simply to have written "God." God causes all things, and this is a clear implication of 1p15, which Spinoza cites first in arguing for the claim at 1p18. Because God causes all things, God causes all of the affections of body. Therefore God is related to them in the sense of 5p11. The argument of 5p14 goes through much more easily.

Second, 5p14 inherits, I think, the same problem for temporality that we find at 5p4dem. I do have some adequate idea in any idea of imagination, if the demonstration of 5p4 is correct, in virtue of the common notions. However, I can do neither more nor less than have this knowledge.

Therefore, it is not clear how I could take the special care that Spinoza recommends at 5p4s. The use of 1p15 does not help matters. Suppose that 1p15 does suggest that, in any knowledge I have, I will also have the knowledge of God. If it does, it does not suggest that there is any process involved in acquiring that knowledge. It is closer to a transcendental argument: in having this knowledge of my affect, I must have this knowledge of God.

The “can bring it about” of 5p14, then, is puzzling. Perhaps Spinoza has some kind of knowledge more rare than the common notions in mind at both 5p4 and 5p14. His reference to 2p40 at 5p4s and his emphasis on body in these arguments suggests that it is perhaps knowledge of God in generality—knowing laws, rules, maxims, or whatever it is at 2p40 that Spinoza takes to follow from the common notions—that we do not simply know in any experience and that we should work to acquire.

A final major problem is Spinoza’s use of “joined” at 5p16dem: “For the love is joined to all the affection of the body (by 5p14).” In my presentation of 5p16 at §5.3 and also in applying 5 to the conclusion at 11 in the schema here, I take Spinoza simply to have slipped in using “joins” rather than “relates” at 5p16dem. After all, Spinoza does not cite the propositions that include the relation “A is joined to B” in any argument leading up to 5p16. The only further citations of these propositions, 5p12 and 5p13, in the *Ethics* are at 5p20s. Moreover, joining—at least as I understand it (see §5.3), brings corporeal affections together in a way that occurs in the random order of nature, as when I happen to encounter two things at once, and so in a way that is relevant to inadequate ideas. The love of God, however, arises from clear and distinct concepts, as Spinoza introduces it: it depends on 5p4, 5p14, and 5p15.

I hope that the emphasis here on body and on the schematic structure of 5p11–5p16 helps readers to begin to work with this difficult argument. It is not satisfying as an interpretation of an argument in the *Ethics*, however, simply to conclude that Spinoza slips. I have done so with respect both to “the idea of God” at 5p14dem and also to “joins” at 5p16dem. The task of understanding this argument remains incomplete. The issue, moreover, is not limited to these passages. The love toward God relates closely to or simply is “the intellectual love of God” to follow in many propositions of *Ethics* 5.

5.3.2 What Pertains to Mind in Relation to Body?

At 5p20s, Spinoza associates the completion of his account of what the mind can do to mitigate bondage with the completion of his account of what pertains to the mind in relation to the body. The view suggests—and this may be a way of understanding the relation between 5p1–5p20s, on the one hand, at 5p21–5p42s, on the other—that there are two respects in which a mind can be powerful. First, in the sense of 4p7, our joyful affects (and prominently our active affects) can restrain or destroy harmful passions and so prevent us from being less powerful. Second, our joyful affects can make us more powerful inherently. In claiming that he has completed his account of what the mind can do against the affects and his account of what pertains to the mind in relation to the body, what Spinoza means is that he has finished discussing the first kind of good and, from this point, will discuss only the second.

Consider the account that Spinoza gives of clear and distinct knowledge at 5p20s:

From what we have said, we easily conceive what clear and distinct knowledge . . . can accomplish against the affects. Insofar as affects are passions, if clear and distinct knowledge does not absolutely remove them (see 5p3 and 5p4s), at least it brings it about that they constitute the smallest part of the mind (5p14). And then it begets a Love toward a thing immutable and eternal (5p15), which we really fully possess (2p45) and which therefore cannot be tainted by any of the vices which are in ordinary love. (G2/294.6–15)

Clear and distinct knowledge is an intrinsic good (4p26, 4p27); that is, it makes a mind that it has more powerful. Spinoza does not emphasize this aspect of its value here, however. Rather, he emphasizes the instrumental value of knowledge as a means of mitigating the bondage to passion: it brings it about that the passions constitute the smallest part of the mind and it also cannot itself be tainted by vices.

The entire account of the power of the intellect up to 5p20s, this advertisement suggests, has this form. Where Spinoza does emphasize knowledge (5p3–5p4s, 5p7, 5p10s, 5p12, 5p14–5p16), he does so because of the effectiveness of knowledge as an instrumental good, a means of mitigating bondage. This, I think, is particularly clear in the prescriptions of 5p10s. They are rules of reason—that we should return hate with nobility and overcome fear through tenacity—but they are valuable not merely as instances of the second kind of knowledge. They are valuable, instead, as

means of mitigating bondage. In applying them, Spinoza does not hesitate to urge us to bring it about that our imagination is affected by the rules extensively. He blends adequate ideas with inadequate ones, finding instrumental means of mitigating bondage wherever he can. This role likewise explains Spinoza's emphasis on the psychological rather than the epistemological nature of reason at 5p7, and his promotion, in the course of the argument to 5p20s, of a means of mitigating passion that is not always related to intrinsic goods. Spinoza applies the doctrine of the association of ideas extensively in the first half of *Ethics* 5 (5p1dem, 5p10s, 5p12dem, and 5p13dem). He argues at 5p12, notably, that it is easier to apply the doctrine to ideas of reason than to other ideas because of the prominence of the common notions in experience. Nevertheless the technique that he describes—reinforce ideas in the mind by means of other ideas and, in that way, make them stronger—does not require knowledge.

Whatever the strength of this interpretation of 5p20s, it is still difficult to understand Spinoza's association of the body with harmful passion. His definition of imagination itself (2p17s) and many of his accounts of passion do emphasize our physical circumstances. Most interpretations of 2p6–2p7s, however, require that body cannot be a cause of ideas of imagination. When my body encounters a bus, the two natures interact, producing a corporeal image. While my idea of imagination that represents the bus is one and the same thing as that image, it does not have the same causes. It must be the case that my mind interacts with the nature of the bus under the attribute of thought in order to produce the idea. The account is similar for passion: if the bus frightens me, the fear, regarded as a mode of thought, has my mind and the bus considered under the attribute of thought as its causes. There is room in Spinoza's metaphysics for a distinction between intrinsic goods and goods that have instrumental value as weapons against harmful affects, but it is not clear why Spinoza associates that distinction in *Ethics* 5 with a second distinction between the mind considered in relation to the body and without relation to the body.

5.4 Eternity, Blessedness, and Salvation: 5p21–5p42s

Eschatology might be understood to concern the end of history or the afterlife. Thus, at the end times we live on or do not, are blessed or damned, and are saved or not. The prospects of salvation and eternal life, on such a

conception of these things, can motivate us to act well while we live in order to earn them. Indeed something like this eschatology was a Catholic doctrine in the seventeenth century. Descartes wrote, for example, in the dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne, that he attempts in the *Meditations* to give the doctrine of the immortality of the soul a basis in reason in addition to faith (AT 7 3), and his defense of the real distinction of mind and body—“it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it” (AT 7 78)—is indeed one of the work’s principal conclusions.

The final propositions of the *Ethics* include a view, from 5p21–5p23, about the part of the mind that is not destroyed with the body but remains and is eternal. From 5p24–5p33, Spinoza develops an account of blessedness. From 5p34–5p40, he offers a more detailed description of blessedness, identifies it with human salvation, and contrasts the value of these goods against lesser, durational goods. The account even incorporates—in the difficulty and rarity of salvation (5p42s)—something like election, on which the virtuous attain salvation through great effort.

These views at least resemble temporal views. It is an open question whether or how different doctrines incorporate temporal notions. If these views concern a temporal life of the mind after the death of the body, how are they consistent with Spinoza’s metaphysics, particularly his identification of the mind and the body as one and the same thing (2p7s, 2p13)? If they do not, then what is the relation between the eternal existence that Spinoza describes and our durational lives, and why does Spinoza appear to defend doctrines on which our eternal existence can change? Because the place of time in the doctrines is unclear, the place of motivation is also: how do Spinoza’s views about eternity and blessedness relate to his views about right human conduct and motivation?

As we have seen, Spinoza announces in 5p20s that he finished everything that “concerns this present life” (G2/294.17–18). That scholium emphasizes what the mind can accomplish against the affects, so Spinoza’s claim there seems to be—a proposition that he presents formally at 5p34—that we are only concerned with the mitigation of passion in the present life or insofar as we endure. Propositions 21–23 offer details about the basis for this claim. Spinoza defends a general characterization about which ideas in the human mind require the endurance of the body (5p21); then defends another about what in the human mind does not concern the endurance of the body but only the eternal essence of the body (5p22); and argues that

what remains of the human mind when the body is destroyed is that part of it that is not constituted of ideas that require the endurance of the body (5p23).

At 5p21, Spinoza draws upon 2p8c and the distinction there between things insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes (this is, to anticipate, insofar as they are eternal) and insofar as they have duration (see §2.1). Whenever a singular thing endures, the idea of that object also endures (2p8c).

All ideas of imagination—on the broad conception of imagination as knowledge of the first kind—have durational existents as objects: they represent their objects as “present or existing.” Therefore, Spinoza concludes at 5p21, “the mind can neither imagine anything, nor recollect past things, except while the body endures.”

The basis of 5p21 in 2p8c suggests that Spinoza takes there be two senses of existence—durational existence and eternal existence—for both minds and bodies. Spinoza characterizes the eternal existence of the human mind at 5p22: there is in God an idea that expresses the essence of the human body from the standpoint of eternity (*sub aeternitatis specie*). This notion, then, allows us to understand 5p23 in an initial way. While the term there “remains” (*remanet*) may suggest endurance, Spinoza's reliance on 5p22 in the demonstration corrects any such connotation. What remains is an idea in God, which is eternal as opposed to durational, and which expresses the essence of the human body. Spinoza writes that this existence “pertains to the essence of the mind” (5p23dem) and “cannot be defined by time or explained through duration. Our mind can be said to endure, and its existence can be defined by a certain time, only insofar as it involves the actual existence of the body” (5p23s).

We have seen Spinoza's account of the ideas that we have insofar as we endure: they are ideas of imagination. From 5p24–5p33, Spinoza turns to an account of the other ideas in a human mind, which it has insofar as it is eternal. These ideas also have the body as an object. This is clearest, I think, at 5p29: “Whatever the mind understands from the standpoint of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*], it understands not from the fact that it conceives the body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the body's essence from the standpoint of eternity” (translation modified).

In these propositions, Spinoza shifts uneasily between accounts of durational existence (roughly, 5p24–5p28) and characterizations of the

mind from the standpoint of eternity (roughly, 5p29–5p33). Spinoza allows himself to refer figuratively to eternity by means of durational expressions (see 5p31s), which, he writes, makes for “an easier explanation and better understanding of the things we wish to show” (see 5p31s). To my eyes, however, this makes the presentation less clear. The principal interpretative task readers face is to understand what the third kind of knowledge is in the enduring mind. We do seem, on Spinoza’s accounts, to possess this knowledge while our bodies endure, and it presumably constitutes part of our conscious mental durational lives. The same knowledge constitutes the essence of the mind, however, which has a different, merely formal, character whenever we do not live. The easy figurative discussion of eternality in durational terms in these propositions makes it extremely difficult to understand these views and so to accomplish this interpretative task.

Here is a provisional suggestion, which is informed by Don Garrett’s work on this issue. Spinoza conceives the relation between the third kind of knowledge in durational life, on the one hand, and eternally, on the other, in this way: if I were to have all of the adequate knowledge of the third kind that I can have, then my knowledge would be the same, perhaps qualitatively or perhaps numerically, as the idea of my essence in God. In the course of my durational life, however, even though the adequate idea that God has of me does include all of these adequate ideas, I myself do not have all of that knowledge. I am more virtuous to the extent that I do; this is the self-knowledge and the knowledge of God that Spinoza values so highly; and the eternal part of my mind, while I endure, is constituted by the knowledge of this sort that I do have.

Turning, then, to 5p24–5p28, these elements emphasize durational existence and the value that the knowledge of God has for us while we live. We gain adequate knowledge of singular things only in third kind of knowledge (recall that Spinoza limits knowledge by reason to knowledge of properties). Such knowledge is always the knowledge of God (5p24) because in possessing it we understand how the formal essence of a given singular thing proceeds from God (2p40s2). The knowledge of God, however, is the highest good (4p28), so what we strive for the most and our greatest virtue is, specifically, understanding things in the third kind of knowledge (5p25); it is what we desire more the more we have it (5p26); and it brings us the “greatest satisfaction of mind there can be” (*summa*,

quae dari potest, mentis acquiescentia) (5p27), an active form of the affect of self-esteem (*acquiescentia in se ipso*; see 3p30s and 3defaff25).

During life, we can desire to attain such knowledge, Spinoza argues at 5p28, from our ideas of reason but not from our ideas of imagination because inadequate ideas cannot cause adequate ideas but adequate ideas can. The proposition does not recur in the demonstrations that follow, but it does hold importance for Spinoza's epistemology and for our understanding of *Ethics* 5. A pressing question for both is whether and how we can gain knowledge of the third kind. This passage, like 2p47s, suggests that can do so from ideas of reason.

The elements that follow, 5p29–5p33, shift back to eternity. Although we may gain knowledge in the course of our lives, the understanding that we have is understanding “not from the fact that [the mind] conceives the body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives body's essence from the standpoint of eternity” (5p29). Because it is the mind insofar as it is eternal that has the body's eternal essence as its object, this is knowledge that mind has insofar as it is eternal (5p31).

One might think that, even if Spinoza can explain the durational mind's acquisition of eternal knowledge by reference to its eternal essence in this way, he still cannot explain the self-esteem of 5p26 and 5p27. These, after all, are changes to us, but what is eternal cannot change. Moreover, these are changes to the power of striving, which is our actual essence: we strive only insofar as we exist.

Where he turns to these affects at 5p32 and 5p33, however, I think that Spinoza's explanation is surprisingly clear. Passions depend upon imagination, which is inherently durational. Thus, if I love God imaginatively, that love will reflect the ongoing influence of some external partial cause on my body. An affect that arises from understanding alone, however, is not imaginative. Even though, in accordance with the definition of love, it has an object, I am nevertheless the adequate cause of what I know. The love toward God (*deum amor*) of 5p16, 5p20, and 5p20s and also the satisfaction of mind (*acquiescentia mentis*) of 5p27 are such affects. The intellectual love of God (*amor dei intellectualis*) of 5p32c–5p42 which arises from the third kind of knowledge is of this sort also. Whereas the love of God and perhaps also the satisfaction of mind associate with changes in striving, power, or perfection, however, the intellectual love of God does not. Rather, “if Joy, then, consists in the passage to a greater

perfection, blessedness must surely consist in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself” (5p33s). Spinoza defines the intellectual love of God and blessedness as the possession, not the attainment, of a level of perfection: it is the perfection that we arrive at by means of the love toward God (5p39). This does make such love—blessedness, salvation, or satisfaction of spirit (*acquiescentia animi*, which Curley makes “satisfaction of mind” at 5p36cs and “peace of mind” at 5p42s), all of which are “really not distinguished” except insofar as they are related to different contexts (5p36cs)—something different in kind from the affects of *Ethics* 3. It is not an affect at all in that sense. It is also not, however, a flatly incoherent concept. It is simply a new concept, and Spinoza gives it an affective label because it relates so closely to the durational affects that explain its extent in a given mind.

With this new conception of love in hand, Spinoza completes his account of the eternal part of the mind, from 5p34–5p40cs, by comparing the eternal part to the durational part. The passages suggest that power of the intellect consists both in its power to mitigate passion, the subject of the 5p1–5p20s, and also in its intrinsic power, the subject of 5p21–5p33. Spinoza reintroduces the topic of the parts of mind by referring again to the passions at 5p34, where he argues that the mind is subject to affects while the body endures. He asserts that God has infinite intellectual self-love (5p35) and identifies the intellectual love of God with “the very love of God by which God loves himself” (5p36). These propositions offer the *Ethics*’ most complete account of salvation (5p36cs) and so hold interest for understanding what kind of consolation Spinoza’s eschatology might be thought to offer.

I think that they also suggest that, insofar as I have adequate knowledge of the third kind, such knowledge is not merely similar to God’s knowledge but is God’s knowledge. Spinoza’s identification of the relevant loves—the human mind’s love of God and God’s self-love—shows that the ideas themselves are also identical. The scholium to 5p40 may confirm this view: Spinoza maintains there that “our mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode” and that such modes “constitute God’s eternal and infinite intellect.”

From 5p37–5p40cs, in a discussion that returns to themes from 5p20s, Spinoza emphasizes the value of adequate ideas, and especially knowledge of the third kind, against passion. Spinoza writes that these propositions are

part of his account of the mind insofar as it is considered without relation to the body's existence (5p40cs), but the content of the propositions suggests something different. They include several references to passion and to the body, and seem to be an effort to show the consequences of his account of blessedness for durational life.

In 5p20s, recall (§5.3, §5.3.2), Spinoza describes two parts of the mind, the part constituted by adequate ideas (later this is also “the eternal part” or “the intellect”) and the durational part constituted by ideas of imagination. The power of the eternal part of the mind against the passions consists in its invulnerability to passion, because nothing is contrary to it (5p37), which gives the mind considered as a whole less vulnerability to harmful passion (5p38). (The claim that the love toward God cannot be tainted by envy or jealousy at 5p20 anticipates this claim.) At 5p39 Spinoza argues that, in life, the body's capability changes with the mind's: “he who has a body capable of a great many things has a mind whose greatest part is eternal.” The demonstration and the scholium return the focus of the argument from anything like an eternal existence and place it squarely on how we may live the best life: we should work to develop our body so that in our mind, “whatever is related to its memory or imagination is of hardly any moment to the intellect” (5p39s). Spinoza summarizes the instrumental and intrinsic value of knowledge at 5p40. Perfection consists in acting more and being acted on less (5p40), and it is the eternal part of the mind that is the best part in both respects (5p40c).

Spinoza's eschatology can, I think, be summarized by means of his distinction between affects, in the sense of *Ethics* 3, as changes in power, on the one hand, and as the attainment of high degree of power in a such changes, the distinctive new forms of love, satisfaction, salvation, and blessedness of *Ethics* 5, on the other. The latter, which are unchanging, apply distinctively to the eternity of the mind. The propositions that close the *Ethics* emphasize this distinction. Spinoza argues at 5p41 that even if we did not know about the mind's eternity, that is, even if we focused on durational existence, we would still recognize the great importance of the active affects, tenacity and nobility. Considered even in the ordinary durational sense, these intellectual goods are the best goods of the mind.

The final proposition, 5p42, emphasizes the contrast between the accounts of blessedness and virtue that Spinoza maintains in the *Ethics* and what he takes to be the “usual conviction of the multitude” (5p42s). The

notion of a temporal afterlife, which rewards moral behavior in this life with great joy after death, makes virtue instrumental to happiness and perhaps a burden that one undertakes in order to earn blessedness. By contrast, for Spinoza, blessedness or satisfaction of spirit and high degree of virtue just is the attainment of a high degree of joy: “Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them” (5p42).

5.4.1 Does the Eternal Part of the Mind Change?

Spinoza distinguishes between two parts of the mind at 5p20s. Inadequate ideas constitute one part (G2/293.28–29). Adequate ideas constitute the other (G2/293.31–32). Later in the course of *Ethics* 5, he calls this latter part of the mind its “eternal part” (5p23, 5p39–5p39s) or its intellect (5p40c). We are more perfect and less susceptible to the affects to the extent that adequate ideas are more prominent in our minds.

Spinoza puts a high value on knowledge in the *Ethics*. Passages like 4p28, on which the knowledge of God is the mind’s highest good, and 5p25, on which the mind’s greatest striving is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge and its greatest virtue is understanding, show this clearly. He also takes us to be able to attain knowledge. Our ability to gain ideas of reason is clear at 2p38, on which we gain such knowledge in any experience. It may be difficult to understand how we can attain intuitive knowledge (see §2.4.2). Nevertheless, the second half of *Ethics* 5 suggests strongly that Spinoza thinks that we can. For example, 5p26, which refers to our capability to have this knowledge, and 5p31, which refers to the amount of intuitive knowledge that we can achieve, both present a given human mind as able to have, and having, intuitive knowledge to a variable extent over the course of a life. At 5p39, Spinoza maintains that, as our bodies are more capable, our minds have a greater part that is eternal. A scholium suggests that this is not just a comparison of several different human beings; growing from an infant to an adult is one way of having a more capable body and a more knowledgeable mind (5p39s).

It seems, then, that Spinoza problematically takes a part of the mind both to have an eternal existence, which “cannot be defined by time or explained through time,” and also to change. How can what is eternal change?

Perhaps—and this is the view that I have adapted from Don Garrett’s work and taken provisionally at §5.4—there is an adequate idea of my essence in God, which I can have to a degree in the course of my life. It does not change, but the extent of my possession of it can change, and that is what happens when I gain knowledge: that part of my durational mind that has knowledge has a greater part that is eternal in the sense that it has more ideas that are also constituents of my mind insofar as it is eternal. This explanation requires a distinction between God’s idea of my essence and the eternal part of my mind that, I think, is not strictly present in the text and is noticeably absent at 5p22–5p23, where one might most expect to see it. It does, however, do useful explanatory work.

A second strategy is to take passages such as 5p23 literally, and to take Spinoza as presenting an account, on which part of the mind exists at all times, or is sempiternal, and immortal. A passage in the KV, where Spinoza writes of “eternal duration” (*onse eeuwigduurentheid*, G1/103 26), supports this view. On it, life is an opportunity to change what has not changed before life and will not change after it. While this position has some attractions, I think that it is decisively refuted by 5p34s, which shows that Spinoza, in the *Ethics*, takes any understanding of eternity in terms of duration to be confused. He writes there that people commonly “are indeed conscious of the eternity of their mind,” but “confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, or memory, which they believe remains after death.”

One might insist on a view, instead, on which there is no sense in which the eternal part of a mind, during the course of life, can change. Doing so requires a critic to explain what a mind does when it acquires knowledge. Even critics who are skeptical about human acquisition of the third kind of knowledge must admit that 2p38 requires that we have and can acquire more of the second kind of knowledge, which is also a constituent of the eternal part of the mind.

Despite this burden, such a reader still has a strategy for explaining how the eternal part of the mind can become greater. Spinoza frequently compares the parts of the mind, such that whatever change makes the eternal part greater also makes the durational, imaginative part smaller. For example, he maintains that minds with the greatest eternal part hardly fear death (5p39s; see also 5p23s, 5p38, 5p38dem, 5p38s, 5p40). These passages suggest that Spinoza conceives of the parts of the mind in proportion to one

another. Whenever the imaginative part of the mind becomes smaller—whenever I overcome my fear, for example—the eternal part of the mind becomes greater in proportion, and it need not change intrinsically. Note that, while one cannot attribute both sempiternity and atemporality to human essence, this final strategy may either stand alone or complement either of the others.

5.4.2 Does the *Ethics* Offer Any Consolation?

Despite familiar ideas—remaining after death, blessedness, salvation, the love of God—*Ethics* 5 might fail to be a genuine eschatology in the eyes of some readers. Perhaps the most basic charge behind such a conclusion is that *Ethics* 5 fails to provide a genuine account of consolation because it includes no meaningful account of an afterlife. On what is probably the best reading of 5p23, there simply is no afterlife. I do not survive the death of my body in the sense of enduring after it does: eternity is not immortality. Even if the evidence that this is Spinoza's view can be explained away, I will still in the afterlife lack what on many views—including, perhaps, Spinoza's own (4p39s)—makes me myself, memory (5p21). I will also lack sensation and passion. Any afterlife that *Ethics* 5 might be read to describe, then, may still be found to be meaningless. If I cannot enjoy the afterlife, then afterlife supplies no consolation.

Accounts of eternity, salvation, and consolation vary widely, however. Perhaps Spinoza's view, even read as ruling out life after the death of the body, does include a meaningful account of what joy can be had in our finite lives. For this purpose, understanding the rich, difficult accounts of satisfaction and knowledge in *Ethics* 5 holds importance. This is evident at the close of *Ethics* 4. At the end of his summary there of the right way of living, Spinoza offers what is, to my eyes, a not very consoling psychological platitude, on which, if I believe that nothing could have been different, then I will feel better in misfortune:

Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have extended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are a part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow. (4app32)

Spinoza proceeds, however, to offer an account of *why* we might feel better that draws upon his intellectualism, the parts of the mind, and satisfaction:

If we understand this clearly and distinctly, that part of us which is defined by understanding, that is, the better part of us, will be entirely satisfied with this, and will strive to persevere in that satisfaction. For insofar as we understand, we can want nothing except what is necessary, nor absolutely be satisfied with anything except what is true. (4app32)

Genuine consolation, the passage suggests, rests not merely in what is on Spinoza's view the true belief that things could not have been otherwise but in knowledge, perhaps detailed knowledge, of how things must be. The second half of *Ethics* 5 might be understood as a defense of the view that this sort of knowledge is the highest human good.

Cast in this light, the transition from the second kind of knowledge to the third kind of knowledge and the concomitant transition from durational to eternal forms of joy are the bases for Spinoza's account of consolation. After making the transition from love toward God to the intellectual love of God and from satisfaction of mind to satisfaction of spirit, Spinoza argues that the second kind of knowledge, which he refers to as "universal knowledge" (*cognitione universali*), is not as powerful as the knowledge of singular things that intuitive knowledge offers:

For although I have shown generally in Part I that all things (and consequently the human mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate . . . still does not affect our mind as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God. (5p36cs)

Read in comparison to the end of *Ethics* 4, Spinoza's view is that the detailed knowledge of *how* things must be as they are offers more consolation than even the knowledge in general *that* they must be however they are.

For Spinoza, salvation or blessedness, finally, consists in this detailed knowledge and the contentment, or love of oneself and love of God, that accompanies it. How precisely to understand his position remains an open interpretative question. The philosophical issue also remains open. An acceptance of things founded either in ignorant despair or in quiescent affectless indifference does not seem a good basis for a human life. Nor does the cheerful acceptance of what comes seem optimal, even if it is better than despair, if that cheerfulness comes from platitudes. What Spinoza recommends instead—and it is achieving this position that is so difficult and so rare—is knowledge of oneself and the world that, in its depth and detail, brings rational love and contentment.

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- LeBuffe, Michael. 2010. "Change and the Eternal Part of the Mind in Spinoza." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 91: 369–384. (My attempt to show that what is eternal for Spinoza need not change intrinsically.)

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